

# **Sikh Ethnonationalism and the Political Economy of the Punjab**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of the Political Studies in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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## **Abstract**

The political economy approach to the study of the violent outbursts of Sikh ethnonationalism in the 1980s shows that these were a product of the struggle for domination between the Sikh capitalist farmers, who sought to establish their complete hegemony over the home market of the Punjab, and the largely 'Hindu' industrial bourgeoisie of India. Various studies of ethnonationalism seek to explore the realm of identities and culture without taking into account the material context in which identities take shape and the culture is influenced. As a result, these studies have failed to explain why certain aspects of identity become hegemonic at a particular historic moment. The political economy approach, on the other hand, studies the phenomenon of identity formation and ethnonationalism in its material context by explaining what constitutes power and what gives rise to conflict in society. It seeks to understand the connection between economics and politics, and explain how the relationship between the two works.

The transition to capitalism in Punjab agriculture, the dominant sphere of economic activity of the state, has concentrated the land and other assets in the hands of a small but powerful class of capitalist farmers (the Kulaks). In their struggle with the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie for domination, Sikh Kulaks have invoked the ideology of Sikhism to build a common bond with the marginal and landless Sikh peasantry. In the name of Sikhism, the Kulaks seek to strengthen their domination over the home market of the Punjab by either demanding the transfer of all jurisdictions except communications, currency, defense, and foreign affairs to the provinces, or by asserting complete independence from India. The militant brigades of the Kulaks, which had their origin in the political economy of predatory capitalism, fought pitched battles with the central government, which defended the interests of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. The massive use of state's coercive apparatus, along with the

inability of the Kulaks to make any headway to broaden their front among the Sikhs of all classes, eliminated the force of the Kulak brigades in the early 1990s. Thus, the violent outburst of Sikh ethnonationalism came to a violent end.

Chapters One and Two are introductory in nature and explain the problematic, define the approach, and review the literature. Chapter Three gives a political economy perspective on how the question of the outside boundaries of Sikhism has been closely linked with the interests of different power blocs that came to dominate Sikhism at different times in history. Chapter Four sketches the transition to capitalism in Punjab agriculture by focusing on the political economy of the green revolution. Chapter Five focuses on the ideology, organization and the strategy of the Kulaks to maintain their hegemony in the state. Chapter Six deals with the struggles of the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie in the domain of center-state relations. Chapter Seven focuses on the political economy of the Kulaks led religious agitation of the Sikhs. Chapter Eight outlines the Kulak struggle for separation and the industrial bourgeoisie's stern response. Chapter Nine is a summary and conclusion.



## Acknowledgment

This study would not have been possible without the help of many people, and the author would like to express his thanks to those who gave him special assistance. First and foremost, I am thankful to Professor Jayant Lele for his guidance through all stages of the study. The careful readings of the rough drafts and thought provoking comments of Professor Lele added immeasurably to the project's scope and insight. I am also thankful to Professors Abigail Bakan and Bruce Berman for their helpful comments during the thesis proposal defense.

The study would not have been possible without the field research trip to the Punjab from September 1996 to December 1996. During my trip, I came in contact with a large number of academics, bureaucrats, journalists, politicians, and, of course, ordinary folks from all walks of life. The space is too limited to thank all of them by mentioning their names, but those who gave special assistance deserve to be mentioned. I am thankful to Professor Harish Puri of the Guru Nanak Dev University whose advice and guidance before and during the field trip speeded the work considerably. I am also thankful to Shri Rashpal Malhotra, director, Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh, for providing beautiful accommodation in the state's capital and the research facilities of the institute. My friend, Harbhajan Halwarvi, editor, *Punjabi Tribune*, Chandigarh, is not only a walking encyclopedia of information but also an important source for establishing contacts in the Punjab. Despite his busy schedule, he met with me on several occasions to share his views on the Punjab problem.

The study would have been impossible without the help of many family members. My mother, Darshan Kaur Purewal, and sister, Narinder Kaur Basra, have been constant sources of encouragement throughout most of my adult life spent in the Canadian universities. Just like any other trip to India, the recent field trip to the Punjab sailed smoothly with the helping hand of my elder brother, Major M.D. Singh. My father-in-

law, Colonel Raghbir Singh, Commandant, Border Security Force (BSF) gave me an insider's perspective on the border smuggling operations in the Punjab. Of course, the study would not have been possible without the love and support of his daughter, my wife Jeetender. Finally, my two beautiful daughters, Tavleen and Avneet, both born in Kingston during my doctoral program, reminded me with their laughter and cries that life involved more than work on a thesis.

## **Glossary**

*Adi Granth*: The Sikh holy book compiled by the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev, in 1603-04.

*Akali Dal*: Literally the party of the immortals; the main political party of Sikh Kulaks in the Punjab.

*Akal Takhat*: The seat of temporal authority inside the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

*Amritdhari*: A baptized Sikh.

*Ardas*: A Sikh prayer.

*Arya Samaj*: A Hindu reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

*Baba*: A term of respect for 'holy' men.

*Bahujan Samaj Party*: Majority Community party; the national political party of the 'lower castes', especially the untouchables.

*Baghti*: Literally devotion, the enlightenment movement of the middle ages.

*Baisakhi*: A north Indian harvest festival in April.

*Bani*: Compositions of the Gurus and other saints.

*Bhai*: Literally brother, a title of respect.

*Bhartaya Janata Party*: The Indian Peoples' party; the main Hindu political organization.

*Chuhra*: A member of the 'low caste' of sweepers; also referred to as *Mazhbi*.

*Dharm*: Religion.

*Dharmsala*: A Sikh temple; previous to this century the Sikh temples were called dharmsalas.

*Guru*: The teacher.

*Gurdwara*: Literally Guru's abode; reference is to the Sikh temples.

*Gurmat*: The teachings of the Gurus.

*Halal*: Muslim way of killing animals.

*Harijan*: Member of the 'untouchable' caste.

*Janata Party*: People's party; a national party dominated by the agrarian landed classes.

*Jathedar*: Leader of a Sikh formation known as *Jatha*.

*Jatt*: Member of the landowning caste of the Punjab.

*Kachha*: Breeches; one of the five Ks in the *Khalsa* dress code.

*Kanga*: Comb (part of five Ks).

*Kara*: Bangles (part of five Ks).

*Kesh*: Uncut hair (part of five Ks).

*Keshdhari*: A Sikh who keeps unshorn hair.

*Khalistan*: Literally the land of the pure; the proposed Sikh state.

*Khalsa*: The baptized Sikh who observes the dress code of five Ks.

*Khattri*: A member of the trading caste. All Sikh Gurus belonged to this caste.

*Kirpan*: Sword (part of five Ks).

*Kuka Lehar*: A nineteenth century Sikh revolt against the British under the leadership of Baba Ram Singh.

*Langar*: A custom of community kitchen.

*Lohar*: A member of the ironsmith caste.

*Masand*: The appointees of the Guru who headed local Sikh congregations.

*Mazhbi*: A member of the 'low caste' of sweepers, also referred to as *Chuhra*.

*Miri-Piri*: The religious and temporal spheres.

*Misl*: A Sikh military formation under the command of a *Sardar*.

*Nanak Panth*: The community of Nanak's followers.

*Nirankari*: A Sikh heterodox sect; particularly popular among the subaltern classes.

*Panth*: Community.

*Radhaswamies*: A Sikh-Hindu heterodox sect.

*Rahitnama*: A code of conduct.

*Raj Karega Khalsa*: The Khalsa shall rule.

*Rashtraya Swayamsevak Sangh*: National Volunteer Organization; a Hindu organization.

*Sahajdhari*: A non-Khalsa Sikh who does not observe the dress code; often Hindu followers of the Sikh Gurus are referred to as *Sahajdhari* Sikhs.

*Sangat*: Congregation.

*Sangh Parivar*: The reference is to the 'family' of Hindu organizations like the BJP, Rashtraya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

*Sarbat Khalsa*: The gathering of the entire Khalsa community.

*Sardar*: The chief; leader.

*Shiromani Akali Dal*: The party of Sikh Kulaks.

*Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhik Committee*: Since 1925, the main elected body of the Sikhs that manages all the Sikh shrines and temples of the states of the Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh from its headquarters in the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

*Singh Sabha*: The Sikh reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

*Sufi*: An Islamic enlightenment sect of the middle ages.

*Tarkhan*: A member of the carpenter's caste.

*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*: The World Hindu Assembly founded in 1964 to promote the unity of Hindus.

## **Dedication:**

**To three legendary heroes of India- Shaheed Rajguru, Sukhdev and Bhagat Singh- who sacrificed their youthful lives to establish a new society free from exploitation and oppression.**

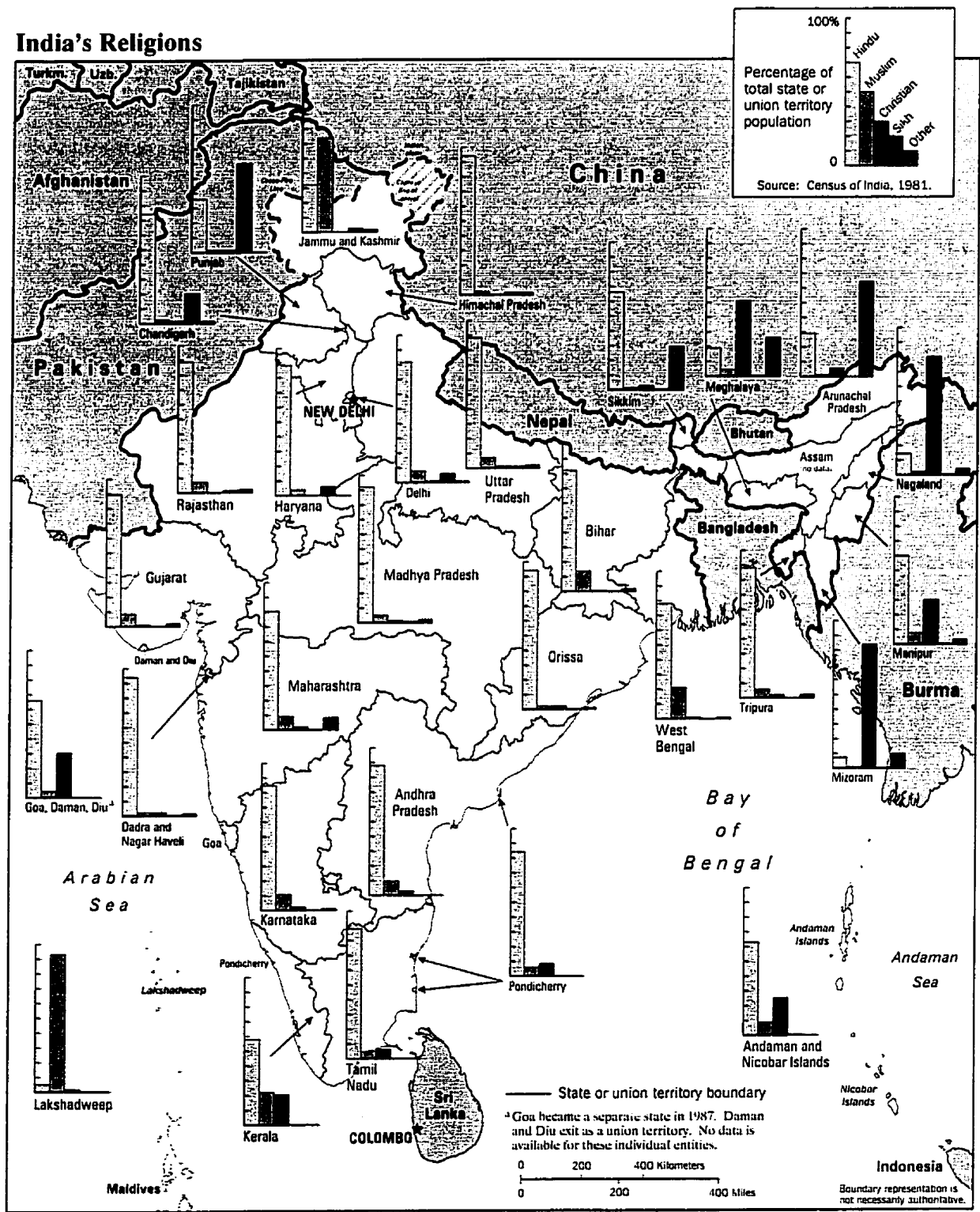
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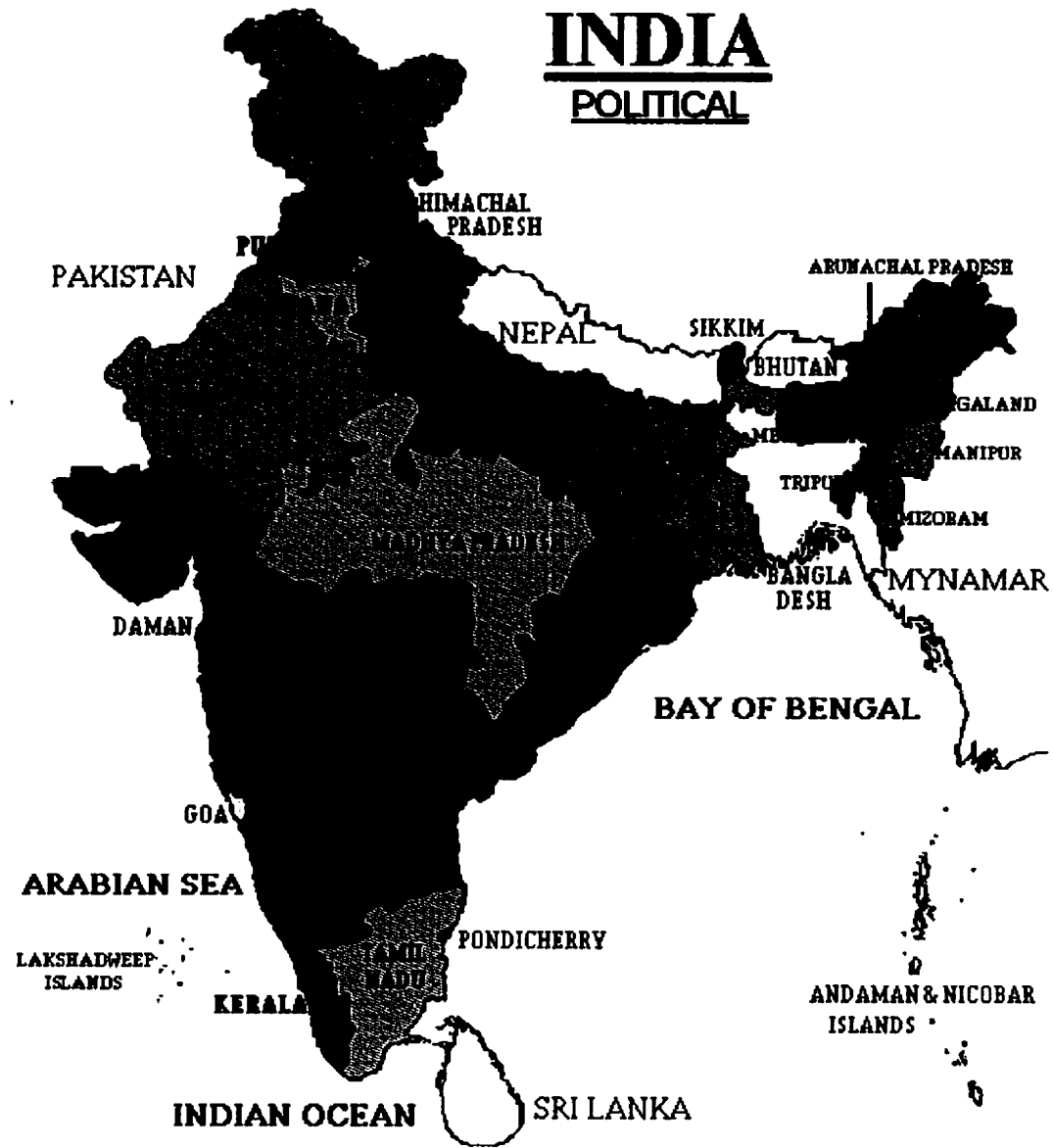


# India's Religions



\* Goa became a separate state in 1987. Daman and Diu exit as a union territory. No data is available for these individual entities.

Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.





**Epigraph:**

ਸੁਣ ਸਜਨੀ ਚੰਦ੍ਰਬੰਦਨ, ਅਗਮ ਨਿਗਮ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ  
ਪੁਰਾਪੁਰਾਤਨ ਪਰੀਤ ਦਾ ਨਵਾਂ ਨਵੇਲਾ ਹੱਲ

**Lend ears, my moon-faced beloved,  
to this story of things profound.  
A new answer to the old question of love, I propound.**

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The study focuses on the rise of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the Punjab, and the violence associated with it. The decade of the 1980s witnessed a violent political agitation of the Sikhs in the Punjab<sup>1</sup> and abroad<sup>2</sup>. In two political documents, the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution (1973), adopted at a national convention of the Akali Dal<sup>3</sup> in 1978, and the Declaration of *Khalistan* (1986), a case was made for "self-determination" of the Sikhs. The former insisted on a highly decentralized form of federation in which the state of the Punjab would control all jurisdictions except communication, currency, defense and foreign affairs. The latter called for an outright independence from India and requested the United Nation member states to recognize a new state of *Khalistan*. The call for the recognition of a Sikh state came in the period when the United Nations witnessed the entry of a large number of new states. In the 'era of globalization', the world has seen the emergence of new economic and political blocs, like the European Union, that seem to have transcended the old concept of a nation-state, at least in theory. At the same time, the emergence of new sub-nationalisms, which broke large multi-national states like the former Yugoslavia, brought new focus to the study of nationalism and the concept of "self-determination" in international law<sup>4</sup>. Nationalism, in its old European usage, "was considered a uniting force."<sup>5</sup> The rise of the new sub-nationalism

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<sup>1</sup> According to one set of figures, more than 25,000 people died in this violence. See Gurharpal Singh (1996). Punjab Since 1984: Disorder, Order and Legitimacy. *Asian Survey*, 36 (4): 415.

<sup>2</sup> A number of violent acts were committed by the Sikhs in Canada including the bombing of an Air-India jetliner in June 1985 *en route* from Montreal to Delhi.

<sup>3</sup> A political party of the Sikhs in the Punjab.

<sup>4</sup> John le Carre, in his novel *Our Game*, described these contradictory processes in the following manner: "While we're pulling down the economic borders, these ethnic crazies are putting up national borders." Cited in J.E. Spence (1996). Ethnicity and International Relations: Interoduction and Overview. *International Affairs*, 72 (3): 439.

<sup>5</sup> Arun Ghosh and Radharaman Chakrabarti (1991). eds. *Ethnonationalism: Indian*

of various ethnic groups, be they regional, linguistic or religious, brought to the fore its divisive nature. Was it a new form of anti-colonial struggle against dominant ethnic groups within larger multi-national states that demanded a new interpretation of the concept of "self-determination"? The Third World states had demanded independence from the colonial countries on the basis of their right to self-determination. The ethnonationalist movements within these states now demanded the same right. The claims of discrimination were leveled at the majority ethnic groups by various minorities within multicultural states.<sup>6</sup> The study of politics has to analyze the political claims these ethnonational movements and their impact on the political stability of various regions. How did these ethnonationalist political movements develop? And why did they pursue separation on the basis of the right to self-determination? As political violence increased with the rise of ethnonationalisms in various states, from Russia to Yugoslavia to India, the question of the violence associated with various secessionist movements demands a careful analysis.

The focus of this study on Sikh ethnonationalism will help us understand both the unique and universal features of this phenomenon of sub-nationalisms. The rise of Sikh ethnonationalism, what is often referred to as the 'Punjab crisis', has brought a sharp academic focus to the agriculturally rich region of India's north-west. The land of the five rivers<sup>7</sup> is divided between two states, India and Pakistan. Three of its five rivers- *Jehlum*, *Chenab* and *Ravi*- flow through the Pakistani Punjab, while the remaining two- *Beas* and *Satluj*- flow through the Indian Punjab. The people of the Punjab, both in India and Pakistan, share a common language, Punjabi, the thirteenth largest spoken language in

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*Experience*. Introduction by editors, Calcutta: Chatterjee Publishers, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> A Princeton University study claimed to have found that the "members of ethnonational minorities manifest substantially less affection toward the state than do members of the dominant group." See, Walker Connor (1994). *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> The word Punjab is a combination of two Persian words: Panj (five) and Aab (river).

the world, and a common history that dates back to the *Harappa* civilization which existed in the third millennium before Christ. Every invader, except the British, came to India through the Punjab, the sub-continent's gateway to the West. It was the last region of India to come under the British rule in 1849. The British-administered Punjab had an area of 144,436 square miles<sup>8</sup> that was divided in 1947 between India, which received roughly one-third, and Pakistan, which received two-thirds of the area of the Punjab. The Indian Punjab constitutes only 1.5 per cent of India's geographical area, but it accounts for 3.90 per cent of the cropped area of the country.<sup>9</sup> This rich delta land with plenty of irrigation, which includes a huge reservoir of underground water, has become India's bread basket and supplies more than two-third of the foodgrains for India's Central Pool. Out of a total geographical area of 5 million standard acres, some 4.2 million acres are under cultivation.<sup>10</sup> The Punjab only has 2.4 per cent of India's 950 million inhabitants, but it is home to three-quarters of India's Sikhs.

Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the first Guru of the Sikhs started preaching, the majority of the Sikhs have lived in the region of the Punjab. In 1991, the total population of Sikhs in India was a little over 16 million, constituting less than two percent of the total Indian population. In Punjab, the total population of Sikhs was 12.7 million out of some 20 million Punjabis, constituting 63 per cent of the population<sup>11</sup>. The followers of Hindu religion constituted an overwhelming majority with 82 per cent of the total population of India in 1991, but their percentage in the Punjab was only 34 per cent. While the great bulk of the Sikhs live in the Punjab, where they

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<sup>8</sup> Syad Muhammad Latif (1964). *History of the Punjab: From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time*. New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> S.S. Johl (1988). *Future of Agriculture in Punjab*. Chandigarh: Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> This means 84 per cent of the total land mass is under cultivation while the remaining 16 per cent of the area is covered under cities, roads, rivers, forests, etc. See, *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> *Census of India 1991: Punjab- Religion*. Chandigarh: Director of Census Operations, p. 4.

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constitute a majority of nearly two-thirds of the population, one out of every four Indian Sikhs lives outside the Punjab. Another important feature of the demography of the Sikhs is that they are overwhelming rural dwellers. Although they constitute a majority of the Punjab's population, the Sikhs are a majority only in the countryside, where 70 per cent of the state's population live. While the Sikhs constitute more than 70 per cent of the rural population compared with the less than 30 per cent who are Hindus, the former are only 31 per cent of the urban population compared with 66 per cent Hindus.<sup>12</sup> Another feature of the Sikh demography is the large number of the Sikhs living outside of India, who obviously are not counted in the Indian census. By the mid-1980s, it was estimated that some 1.5 million Sikhs live abroad<sup>13</sup>. Most of the Sikh diaspora lives in Britain, Canada and the United States.

The Sikh majority in the state of the Punjab, however, is a recent phenomenon. The present state of Punjab has emerged from two partitions, first on a religious basis in 1947 and then on the linguistic basis in 1966. In the British Punjab, the Sikhs constituted about 13 per cent of the total population, compared with 56 per cent Muslims and 30 per cent Hindus.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the partition of the Punjab in 1947, 16 out of 29 districts were awarded to Pakistan. In the largest migration of humans in this century, nearly all Hindus and Sikhs crossed over to the Indian side of the Punjab, while the Muslims

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<sup>12</sup> Devinder Pal Sandhu (1992). *Sikhs in Indian Politics: Study of a Minority*. New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, p. 19. Historically, the majority of the Sikhs have always lived in the rural areas. Between 1891 and 1921, the proportion of the urban Punjabi population remained at 9.5 per cent for the total population; the Sikhs, however, constituted only 5.4 per cent of the urban population in the same period. See, Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*. London: Allen and Unwin, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> This means that one out of every 10 Sikhs live outside India. They constitute one of the largest segments of the overseas Indian diaspora which is estimated to be nearly 14 million. See, Bruce La Brack (1989). *The New Patrons: Sikhs Overseas*. in *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and the Experience Beyond Punjab*. edited by N. Gerald Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, pp. 271-72.

<sup>14</sup> Kailash Chander Gulati (1974). *The Akalis: Past and Present*. New Delhi: Ashajanak Publications, pp. 18-19.



migrated to the Pakistan side. As a result, Hindus became a new majority with 62 per cent of the population of the Punjab compared with 35 per cent for the Sikhs.<sup>15</sup> The 1966 linguistic division of the Punjab among the states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and the Punjab reversed these figures in favor of a Sikh majority. In 1971, the Sikhs constituted 60 per cent of the new state's population<sup>16</sup>, and they have maintained that majority ever since.

As an overwhelming majority of the Sikhs live in the villages of the Punjab, and hence the main source of their livelihood is agriculture. The two main productive forces in the countryside are the land and the people. All rural people, however, do not have the same relation to the land. The relationship to land in the Punjab countryside, much like the rest of India, depends on the membership in the class-based social structure. The caste plays an important role in the class structure in the rural Punjab. While the landed classes belong almost exclusively to the upper castes, not all members of the upper castes are land owners. On the other hand, the lower castes of the villages belong exclusively to the lower classes, who do not own the means of production. Although the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh scriptures denounced the caste system, and urged the followers of Sikhism to give up their caste affiliations, present Sikh society, much like the rest of Hindu society, remains caste-based. In the absence of Brahmins in Sikhism, the land-owning *Jatts* occupy the top position in the social hierarchy, similar to the Hindu *Rajputs* of Rajasthan<sup>17</sup>. The close second position in the caste hierarchy is occupied by a trading and merchant caste, the *Khatris*, an urban petty bourgeoisie whose position is similar to that of the *Kayasthas* of Uttar Pradesh. Since most of the Sikh petty bourgeoisie from the

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<sup>15</sup> J.S. Grewal (1996). *The Akalis: A Short History*. Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publications, pp. 111-112.

<sup>16</sup> Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>17</sup> Most of the rural Hindu *Brahmins* are either shopkeepers and traders, or landless laborers.

*Khatri* caste lives in the cities, the second ladder in the caste hierarchy in the rural areas is occupied by the Hindu *Brahmins*, *Khatri*s, *Mahajans* and *Banias*. The artisan castes of *Tarkhans* and *Lohars*, along with the *Kalals*, *Kombos*, *Malis* and *Sainis* constitute the intermediate strata. The *Chuhars* and *Chamars*, also known as the *Mazhbi* and *Adharmi* Sikhs, occupy the lowest position, similar to Hindu untouchables.<sup>18</sup> In 1881 census, the only time when question about caste were clearly and specifically asked, the *Jatts* were found to be sixty-six per cent of the Sikh population. Based on this, it is often assumed that the *Jatts* form two-thirds of the present population of Sikhs. However, this figure fails to take into account the changes that occurred as a result of the activities of the Sikh reformers during the British *raj* who converted lower caste Hindus to Sikhism.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the actual number, the *Jatts* are numerically the largest component of the Sikh community.<sup>20</sup>

Although the land is concentrated in the hands of the *Jatt* caste, not all *Jatts* are land owners. The capitalistic transformation in the Punjab agriculture in the post-independence period, particularly during the green revolution years, has witnessed the trend of concentration of land in the hands of a minority while the majority of the small and marginal landowners became landless<sup>21</sup>. Thus, membership of the higher caste does

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<sup>18</sup> For a caste hierarchy among the Sikhs, see V.D. Chopra, R.K. Mishra and Nirmal Singh (1984). *Agony of Punjab*. New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, pp. 144-145.

<sup>19</sup> Both the 1911 and 1921 censuses reported a "loss of large numbers" of the outcasts "by the Hindu and Muslim communities, and a significant increase in their numbers among the Sikhs." See, Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). op. cit., p. 24. Initially the reformers showed no interest in the lower castes; however, in response to the legislative and political pressure of numbers, the reformers started recruiting as many lower castes as possible. See Vijay Prashad (1995). The Killing of Bala Shah and the Birth of the Valmiki: Hinduisation and the Politics of Religion. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 32 (3): 287-325.

<sup>20</sup> According to the 1997 voters list, the *Jatt* Sikhs constituted 37.2 per cent of the total voters of the Punjab. *The Times of India* (Online Edition), February 16, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> In the early 1980s, more than 75 per cent of all agricultural wealth, including land and moveable assets, was in the hands of only 10 per cent of the rural households, while the poorest 70 per cent of the rural households possessed less than 7 per cent of all assets.

not imply membership of the higher class. Many of the *Jatt* Sikhs have become landless laborers, an economic position similar to the so-called lower castes who generally belong to the class of landless laborers. A small minority of the intermediate strata has either acquired the class status of the landlords by purchasing lands, particularly among *Sainis* and *Kombos*, or the class status of the petty bourgeoisie, especially among the artisan castes of *Tarkhans* and *Lohars*, who have opened businesses such as furniture manufacturing with family labor<sup>22</sup>. However, the majority of the intermediate castes in the villages belong to the class of landless laborers. Thus, numerically the largest class in the villages is not the landlords but the landless laborers who sell their labor power to earn a living. A majority of the 'high caste' *Jatts*, the intermediate strata of *Kombos*, *Sainis*, *Tarkhans* and *Lohars*, and the 'lower caste' *Chuhars* and *Chamars* are all members of this class of landless laborers.

The caste-class and rural-urban cleavages among the Sikhs have presented a problem for Sikh identity, and ethnonationalism based on such identity. What is the common denominator that can unite the rural landless and landowning classes with sections of the urban petty-bourgeoisie for a 'common purpose?' What is this 'common purpose' that can unite such a diverse group against an imaginary 'common enemy?' Who defines this 'common purpose' and the 'common enemy', and whose interest does it serve? The attempts to build an exclusionary anti-Hindu Sikh identity by circumventing the need to address the internal caste-class and rural-urban divisions among the Sikhs presents a problematic not only for the political and economic interests that defined the content of Sikh ethnonationalism but also for the academics who tried to view this expression of

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See Harish K. Puri (1985). Punjab: Elections and After. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 20 (40): 1682.

<sup>22</sup> Under the feudal mode of production, the *Tarkhans* (woodworkers) and *Lohars* (ironsmiths) worked for the landed classes in exchange for food, much like the rest of the producing classes. Now money is exchanged for the commodities produced by these two castes.

'sub-nationalism' by ignoring its material context. The literature review in Chapter 2 makes it clear that cultural constructs like Sikh identity and their political expressions in the form of ethnonationalism cannot be studied in isolation from their economic material base.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Approach and Literature Review**

The study seeks to apply the political economy approach to understand the economics and the politics of Sikh ethnonationalism. First and foremost, the political economy approach assumes that there is a dialectical relation between politics and economics, and that the task of social science is to "understand what the connection is and how it works."<sup>1</sup> The political manifestations of Sikh ethnonationalism require a careful analysis to understand the relationship between economic interests and political conflict. These manifestations are the key to separate fact from fiction, and reality from myth. The study of the economic base, the primary activity of man, is vital in understanding the context in which various identities take shape and culture is influenced. It will show how Sikh identity evolved over time, and why certain aspects of this identity became hegemonic at a particular historic moment. The political economy approach is critical of studies of the phenomenon of ethnonationalism whose sole focus is on identities and culture and that ignore the context in which various identities are shaped. Secondly, the political economy approach contends that a phenomenon cannot be studied in isolation from the sum total of its social reality. In order to grasp the essence of a phenomenon, the dialectical relations between the part and the whole must be studied. Thus, the rise of Sikh ethnonationalism must be studied in its different aspects and underlying connections with the larger social reality of the Indian and international political economy. In its focus on the dialectical relationship of parts to the social totality, the method of political economy is interdisciplinary and holistic at the same time. In volumes of studies on ethnonationalism, however, the political economy approach is either ignored or belittled.

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<sup>1</sup> Neera Chandhoke (1994). Marxian Political Economy as Method: How Political is Political Economy? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 (5): PE-15.

### **Literature Review: Ethnonationalism**

In his review article, Michael Brown has argued that theoretical studies on the phenomenon of ethnonationalism fall into four categories: (i) Structural perspective: studies in this category focus on the problematic of weak states and ethnic geography; (ii) political perspective: these studies have focused on the discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group politics and elite politics; (iii) economic/social perspective: the main focus of these studies is the economic problems, trials and tribulations of economic development, and modernization; and (iv) cultural perspective: these studies have focused on the cultural discrimination against minorities, and group histories and group perspectives about each other.<sup>2</sup> The general problem of this theoretical literature is two-fold: Firstly, the studies have focused only on a small part of a larger social reality, and secondly, these studies have attempted to grasp the essence of a phenomenon in isolation from its material context. The study of ethnicity and ethnonationalism is nothing but a study of actual human formations and their relationship to each other. The first real human relationships are shaped in their daily activity to earn a living. This primary activity is historically determined according to the people's "relations to the means of production, according to their role in social labor and, consequently, according to the mode by which they acquire their share of social wealth."<sup>3</sup> Both ethnicity and ethnonationalism are historically specific phenomena associated with the rise of capitalism. Thus, any attempt to grasp the essence of these phenomena by divorcing them from the capitalist mode of production will only distort reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael E. Brown (1997). *The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview*. in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: An International Security Reader*. Edited by Michael E. Brown et al. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 5-12.

<sup>3</sup> G.A. Kozlov (1977). *Political Economy: Capitalism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 21.

### **Modernization, Cultural Pluralism and Internal Colonialism**

Capitalism has created divisions and unity at the same time. Capital strives to achieve 'national' unity in order to capture the home market for the complete victory of commodity production. In Europe, language-based identity played a leading role in capital's attempt to capture the home markets. The very process of creating unity also leads to disunity as capitalists compete with each other both inside and outside the nation states. Various theoretical approaches on ethnicity and ethnonationalism have ignored this link between capitalism and nationalism. As a result, the analysis has produced various distortions. The modernist school's failure to grasp the essence of this contradictory process of capitalist accumulation has produced a distorted picture of the rise of nationalism in the developing countries and also in Europe. The modernist school contends that the experience of Europe is essential to understand nationalism in developing world. However, the rise of nationalism in Europe in their analysis is totally divorced from the rise of capitalism. Thus, it is unsurprising that the school has captured neither the essence of nationalism in Europe nor its rise in other parts of the world. Karl Deutch stated that the development of nationalism in other areas has been "extremely similar" to that of Europe. While the West European nationalism, according to Deutch, was early, slow and integrative, in Eastern Europe it was late, quick and secessionist. The experience of Africa and Asia was summed up as "still later and still faster."<sup>4</sup> If the expansion of capitalism from Western Europe to Eastern Europe and the rest of the world is linked with the spread of nationalism as outlined by Deutch, then it appears as a by-product of the capitalist mode of production. Deutch, however, makes no such claims. It is for this reason that he has difficulty explaining why nationalism developed in a

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<sup>4</sup> Karl W. Deutsch (1969). *Nationalism and Its Alternatives*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 68-70.

manner described by him in different parts of the world in different fashion and with different consequences.

Riggs has also ignored the link between the capitalist mode of production and nationalism in his study of different waves of ethnonationalism. He has used the metaphor of *Tsunamis* (Japanese for tidal wave) to sum up the historical process that led to the rise of present day ethnonationalism. The three *tsunamis* cover the period of two centuries: the first *tsunami* covered the period from national states to modern empires; the second from liberation movements to quasi-states; and the third from self-determination to ethnonationalism.<sup>5</sup> Borrowing this metaphor, Sathaymurthi has outlined the following three *tsunamis* of ethnonationalism in India since independence: The first *tsunami* is from the purely administrative division of colonial India to a new post-independence division of linguistic states; in the second, regional movements with ethnonationalist element become "transmuted...into movements of autonomy in different degrees; and in the third, the "intensification of opposition among the masses of the people towards the national ruling party as a consequences on India's internal emergency."<sup>6</sup> While the historical tidal waves of Riggs' analysis covered the period of two centuries, Sathaymurthi's tidal waves have covered the historical process within the first three decades of India's independence. Neither writer has explained why each historical period shaped different ethnic identities, or why the period covered by each *tsunami* has disproportionate affect on different regions and different ethnic groups.

The cultural pluralism thesis holds that the process of 'modernization' widens the differences between those who are assimilated and those who are not, thus causing conflict. Exactly what makes certain nations, cultures, or groups within society better

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<sup>5</sup> Fred W. Riggs (1995). Ethnonational Rebellions and Viable Constitutionalism. *International Political Science Review*, 16 (4): 380-387.

<sup>6</sup> T.V. Sathaymurthi (1996). Centralized State Power and Decentralized Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (13): 835.



candidates for 'assimilation' into the modernization process is not explained. The thesis is also unable to analyze why conflicts are inevitable between the 'modernized' and the 'traditional' people. The conflicts certainly arise between those who acquire ownership of the means of production and those who are divorced from the means of production as a result of the transition to capitalism. The pluralists, however, make no such claims. The question of the transition to capitalism in Europe and European capital's exploitation of the colonial world has remained outside the domain of the pluralist thesis. Modernization is treated as merely a technical and cultural process. Central to the pluralist thesis is the argument that the benefits of modernization are not shared by all groups equally. Bates argued that:

Crucial to the emergence of ethnic competition is that societies as well as individuals tend to be evaluated along the dimension of modernity. Conflict is caused because groups that are more wealthy, better educated and more urbanized tend to be envied, resented, and sometimes feared by others; and the basis for these sentiments is the recognition of their superior position in the new system of stratification.<sup>7</sup>

Explaining the uneven share of benefits as a result of modernization, the cultural pluralism thesis holds that due to cultural differences that exist between people some groups do not take part in the process and institutions of modernization, thus they remain backward.<sup>8</sup> The role of colonialism and imperialism in contributing to this 'backwardness' has not attracted any attention from the pluralists. This task is taken up by the internal colonialism thesis. This thesis focuses on the process of development that left various areas underdeveloped and dependent. Hechter pointed out that the

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<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Bates (1974). *Ethnic Competition and Modernization in Contemporary Africa*. *Comparative Political Studies*, 6 (1): 462.

<sup>8</sup> M.G. Smith (1974). *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

"movements for regional separatism are typically based on the twin claims of economic and cultural discrimination against peripheral areas by the central government."<sup>9</sup>

Explaining the underdevelopment of Ireland, Hechter argued that while England developed a well-diversified economy, the hinterland of Ireland developed a specialized economy. It developed as an appendage to the English metropolitan economy, supplying primary or extractive products for metropolitan industrial manufacture and distribution. Apart from the supply of agricultural products, Ireland supplied cheap labor for the metropolis. Thus, the internal colonialism thesis "suggests that peripheral ethnic identity will persist following differentiation, given the institutionalization of a cultural division of labor."<sup>10</sup> Hechter's study claims to cover a period of over four centuries (1536-1966). Exactly when did the Irish ethnic identity develop following differentiation and a cultural division of labor? Has it ceased to exist as a result of Irish independence and the development of its national economy which has certainly put an end to the 'institutionalized' cultural division of labor?

### **Post-Modernization Perspective**

Moving away from the modernization, pluralist and the internal colonial theses, the post-modernists have argued that ethnicity and nationalism are nothing but social and political constructions<sup>11</sup>. Brass has argued that identity formation is "a process created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities."<sup>12</sup> The values and cultural forms of ethnic groups are appropriated by

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Hechter (1975). *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>11</sup> Michael L. Grose (1996). Restructuring Ethnic Paradigms: From Premodern to Postmodern Perspectives. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 23 (1&2): 51.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Brass (1991). *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 16.

the elite "in competition for political and economic advantages."<sup>13</sup> The Sikh elite, according to Brass, has appropriated the following three sets of symbols to shape communal consciousness among the Sikhs:

Historical symbols derived from the Sikh history of the Sikh kingdoms before the British conquest of the Punjab; religious symbols which have been used to define the boundaries between the Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab in modern times; and linguistic symbols which have associated the Sikhs with a particular form of the Punjabi language written in the *Gurmukhi* script.<sup>14</sup>

He adds that the consciousness arising from such symbolism is "built more upon the selection and manipulation of symbols from the past than the persistence of real political structure into the present."<sup>15</sup> The 'elite' in competition for economic and political power appear extremely intelligent in the 'selection' and 'manipulation' of symbols from the past to construct identities and communal consciousness. If one section of this 'elite' is able to construct one identity, the other sections of the 'elite' must be able to construct other sets of identities as the masses of the people appear quite passive in the postmodernist perspective of Brass. What gives the 'elite' an access to economic and political power? Why is it that only the 'elite' is able to manipulate and select symbols from the past to create identities? The producing classes of society are also engaged in economic and political struggle with the owners of the means of production. Why is it that they only appear as naive followers of the 'elite' not able to pursue their own path?

What appears from the postmodernist perspective is that ethnic identities are based on nothing more than a manipulation of symbols, be they historical, religious, or linguistic. For Anderson, a nation is not "uniquely produced by the constellation of

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Brass (1974). *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

certain objective social facts; rather, it is thought out, created."<sup>16</sup> Anderson claimed that his thesis on 'census, map and museum' analyzed "the way in which, quite unconsciously, the late 19th century colonial state dialectically engendered the grammar of the nationalisms that arose to combat it. Indeed, one might go so far to say that the state imagined its local adversaries, as in an ominous prophetic dream, well before they came into historical existence."<sup>17</sup> It appears that the sole contributors to anti-colonial nationalisms were the bureaucrats and the intelligentsia trained in the colonial metropolis. Thus, it is not the Indian bourgeoisie and other social classes under its leadership, in particular the peasantry, that rose to free India from the colonial *raj* but the likes of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) cadre who inspired the freedom movement with their imagination. Further, Anderson argued that the national consciousness emerged as a result of the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language which "created the possibility of a new form of imagined community."<sup>18</sup> Print technology seems to have disproportionate impact on the possibility of creating an imagined community. The same print technology could be as helpful in destroying such imagined communities and creating new 'communities' with some other imagination at work. The experience of the Punjab and, indeed, the Indian sub-continent refutes the claims of Anderson's theses. The division of the continent on a religious rather than a linguistic basis in 1947 shows that the "convergence of capitalism and print technology" did not produce language-based nationalism similar to the European model. In fact, the British colonialists achieved their last victory in the sub-continent by defeating the Punjabi state established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

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<sup>16</sup> Partha Chatterjee (1986). *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative?* London: Zed Press, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict Anderson (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, p. xiv.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

The literature review on ethnonationalism shows a considerable lack of understanding the material context of identities. Furthermore, the lack of appreciation of the political economy approach by various authors shows the enormous bias of the theoretical literature in favor of normal political science and cultural pluralism. Contrary to this trend, the specific literature on the 'Punjab problem' reveals a prominent role played by the political economy school. The holistic approach of the political economy begins with an investigation of the specific social relations directly connected with the production process. Thus, the political economy school began its investigation of the specific social formation of the Punjab as a part of its debate on the "Indian mode of production" in the 1960s.

### **Punjab - Literature Review: The Modes of Production Debate**

The aforementioned debate focused on the question of the transition to capitalism in agriculture, particularly as a result of the adoption of the green revolution agro-technologies. Byres noted that "one excellent result of the debate and the activities thrown up by the so-called 'green revolution' has been the rescue of the study of Indian agriculture from the limbo of 'cow dung economics', whither it was consigned with dismissive contempt until the mid-60s."<sup>19</sup> The prospect of rising agricultural production, though limited to certain regions, indeed sparked a lively debate among the Marxist and the liberal scholars of India and abroad. The famous debate on the 'mode of production in India' began in the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly* in the mid-60s and continued for more than a decade. Banaji noted that three separate tendencies emerged among the Marxist scholars<sup>20</sup>. The first tendency denied the intrusion of capitalist

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<sup>19</sup> T.J. Byres (1972). The Dialectic of India's Green Revolution. *South Asian Review*, 5 (2): 100.

<sup>20</sup> Jairus Banaji (1978). Capitalist Domination and Small Peasantry: Deccan Districts in the Late 19th Century. in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*. Essay Collection, Lahore: Vanguard Books, p. 408.

relations in the country altogether. It argued that the changes brought about by the green revolution were merely quantitative in the framework of pre-capitalist relations. Rudra, for example, argued that "the emergence of a new class would imply that the transformation of quantity into quality has taken place. I would suggest that such a transformation has yet to take place."<sup>21</sup> The second tendency, led by Utsa Patnaik, agreed that the capitalist relations have developed to a limited extent, but it was asserted that this development has taken place mainly since independence. Bringing in the Leninist distinction between the 'moment' and the 'trend', Patnaik stated that "at independence the 'moment' of development of agrarian relations may be taken as one in which the landlord-peasantry dichotomy was the most important while other relations also existed."<sup>22</sup> In a subsequent study, she concluded that "the contemporary Indian situation is somewhere between that of China in the 1930s and the capitalist countries of the 1920s."<sup>23</sup> The third tendency belonged to the Frankian dependency school that saw "in the country's historical integration into the capitalist world economy sufficient proof of the prevalence of bourgeois relations within the country."<sup>24</sup>

The major contribution of this debate was its focus on the question of relations of production in the transition to capitalism in agriculture. However, the debate failed to take into consideration the qualitatively new relations of production which had emerged as a result of the capitalist process in agriculture that divorced the producer from the means of production- the land. Many authors concluded that the feudal mode of production has not been replaced by a capitalist mode of production. These conclusions,

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<sup>21</sup> Ashok Rudra (1978). Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Reply. in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India*. op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Utsa Patnaik (1978). Class Differentiation Within the Peasantry: An Approach to Analysis of Indian Agriculture. in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India*, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>23</sup> Utsa Patnaik (1987). *Peasant Class Differentiation: A Study in Method with Reference to Haryana*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 28

<sup>24</sup> Jairus Banaji (1978). op. cit., p. 408.

according to Omvedt, were influenced by the debate's focus "on the colonial period" which "failed to analyze the qualitatively different processes at work in the post-colonial phase."<sup>25</sup> As a result, it failed to understand the qualitatively new relations of production which brought new contradictions between agriculture and industry, countryside and city to the fore. In the case of Punjab, for example, the relationship between city and countryside was no longer based on a mutually beneficial alliance of feudal landlords and colonial capital. The capitalistic transformation in agriculture brought the rural landowning classes in direct contradiction with urban petty bourgeoisie, the latter of which controlled the markets, and the industrial bourgeoisie which produced the agricultural inputs<sup>26</sup>. The demands of capitalist farmers in 1973-74 for the nationalization of agricultural markets, which was accepted by Indira Gandhi's government in 1974 but reversed under strong pressure from the urban petty-bourgeoisie, and the lowering of prices for agricultural machinery, including lowering of tariffs on such items as tractors, were a manifestation of these contradictions<sup>27</sup>. A focused analysis of the struggle between industrial and agricultural capital for domination would have helped to make comprehensible the manifestations of Sikh ethnonationalism contained in the 1973 document- *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution (ASR).<sup>28</sup> Secondly, the capitalist transformation in agriculture brought to the fore the question of surplus population as a

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<sup>25</sup> Gail Omvedt (1981). Capitalist Agriculture and Rural Classes in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 (52): A-140.

<sup>26</sup> Unlike the feudal landlords who spent all the surplus in non-productive ways, the class of capitalist farmers invested a major portion of the surplus in the land and agricultural machinery. In 1972, rich capitalist farmers, those who owned more than 20 acres of land, purchased 69 per cent of all the tractors sold in the state, 25 per cent of the tube-wells/pumping sets, 28 per cent of the threshers and 43 per cent of the agricultural land. See Harish K. Puri (1983). Green Revolution and Its Impact on Punjab Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 (1): 102.

<sup>27</sup> For the political economy of the contradiction between agriculture and industry, see Chapter 6.

<sup>28</sup> For the political economy of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, see Chapter 5.

result of peasant differentiation, the process that divorced the producer from the means of production. It produced a large class of landless laborers who were dependent on the sale of their labor power to capitalist farmers. The political instability caused by conflicts between the haves and have-nots, and the strategy of the dominant classes to control these conflicts and resolve them in their favor provides insights into the relationship between specific economic interests and the political conflicts in the state. Thus, the failure to understand the qualitative changes that had occurred as a result of the capitalist transformation in the agrarian sector by the modes of production debate limited the ability of the political economy school to understand the political developments in the state which gradually pushed the Punjab into political instability.

### **Socio-Economic Analysis**

As the incidents of political violence increased gradually in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Punjab, a new school of political economy, what came to be known as the 'socio-economic' school of thought, emerged to find the economic basis of the political agitation. Whereas the 'old debate' focused on the analysis of the modes of production, the new debate focused its attention on the caste/class divisions in the Punjab. It sought to explain the anti-Hindu manifestation of Sikh ethnonationalism by showing how the leading castes in two communities- Hindus and Sikhs- invoked the loyalties of their co-religionists to safeguard their interests. Since the class of capitalist farmers belonged exclusively to the caste of the *Jatt* Sikhs and urban petty bourgeoisie was divided between a majority Hindu and a minority Sikh *Khatris*, it was assumed that the rise in religious fundamentalism reflected the clash of interests between the castes of capitalist farmers and urban petty bourgeoisie. The underlying assumption of this caste/class analysis was that caste is the main form in which class manifests itself<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> The debate on caste-class categories has focused on several questions: Is caste only a



D'Souza states that the competing sectors of the economy are occupied by castes belonging to two different religious categories. Since these castes also occupy leading positions in their respective religious categories, they are able to invoke the solidarity of their religious groups in safeguarding their economic interests from the encroachments of the dominant castes of the opposite religious group.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the fight between economic interests of the *Jatt* Sikh farmers and the *Khatris* Hindu traders assumes a religious character, which is responsible for the animosity between the two religious communities. Along the same lines, Singh locates the economic basis of inter-caste/inter-religious rivalry basically within the urban trading caste of the *Khatris*. He contends that the Sikh *Khatris* (*Bhapas*) act as junior partners of the Hindu *Khatris* in the urban areas of the Punjab. "What irks the Sikh traders most is the fact that the Hindu traders surpass them in the appropriation of money from the Sikh agriculturists. This has generated tensions between the two trading communities, and the Sikh traders, being losers, invoke religious fundamentalism to wean away the Sikh agriculturists from the Hindu traders."<sup>31</sup> The ultimate outcome of this political agitation is the emergence of Sikh identity in opposition to the Hindus and hence the demand for a separate Sikh state. Gill and Singhal argue that since Sikh farmers have to sell their product through Hindu traders and buy agricultural inputs from Indian monopolies, it brings the entire Sikh peasantry into a direct contradiction with traders and industrial monopolies. In this contradiction,

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manifestation of class? Are classes and castes different categories? What is the material base of caste? See Gail Omvedt (1982), ed. *Land, Caste and Politics in Indian States*. New Delhi: Department of Political Science.

<sup>30</sup> Victor D'Souza (1985). Economy, Caste, Religion and Population Distribution: An Analysis of Communal Tension in Punjab. in *The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response*. Edited by Abida Samuiddin. Delhi: Mittal Publications, pp. 52-74.

<sup>31</sup> Gopal Singh (1985). Socio-Economic Bases of the Punjab Crisis. in Abida Samiuddin, op. cit., p. 85.

the party of the rich farmers, the Shiromani Akali Dal, manipulates and leads the Sikh peasantry.<sup>32</sup>

The caste/class analysis of the socio-economic school suffered from several shortcomings in its attempts to explain the economic basis of Sikh ethnonationalism. First and foremost, this school failed to grasp the essence of the new relations of production under capitalism. It continued to assume that the transition to capitalism had only sharpened the pre-capitalist contradictions. Thus, the contradiction between town and country simply remained a contradiction between the *Jatt* Sikh farmers and the Hindu *Khatris* traders. In essence, capitalism had created sharp class divisions among not only the *Jatt* farmers but also among the *Khatris* traders. By 1980, the majority of the former small and marginal farmers, including lower middle category farmers, were landless laborers.<sup>33</sup> The small traders also lost out to big traders and merchants. The landless *Jatt* Sikhs and the *Khatris*, who were either small shop owners run by family labor or workers, did not have any clashing economic interests. The economic conflict was being played between the capitalist farmers and the urban petty bourgeoisie, not between the *Jatt* Sikhs and the Hindu *Khatris*. Secondly, the socio-economic school overlooked the major contradiction between agriculture and industry. Although Gill and Singhal recognized the importance of this contradiction in their thesis statement, no attention was paid to this important issue in the subsequent analysis which remained mired in the caste/class model. The political manifestations of the capitalist farmers, contained in the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution (ASR) and subsequent declarations, have made it abundantly clear that the primary struggle was between the two leading sectors of the economy- agriculture and industry. The rich capitalist farmers were able to form

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<sup>32</sup> Sucha Singh Gill and K.C. Singhal (1985). *Genesis of Punjab Problem*. in Adida Samiuddin, op. cit., pp. 37-51.

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 4.

political coalitions with the urban petty bourgeoisie in the Punjab<sup>34</sup> but they fought numerous political battles against the industrial bourgeoisie. The political strategists from both the agricultural and the industrial interests have sought the co-operation of the urban petty bourgeoisie in their struggle against each other. This did not mean that the urban petty bourgeoisie had no contradiction with capitalist farmers; however, it did reveal that the urban petty bourgeoisie's contradictions with the latter were secondary to the major contradiction which existed between agriculture and industry. Finally, the socio-economic school ignored the contradiction between capitalist farmers and landless laborers in the countryside. Although it took on a religious garb, the struggle against the *Niranakaris*<sup>35</sup>, a Sikh heterodox sect, was essentially a struggle for hegemony over the producing classes in the countryside. The brutal attacks of capitalist farmers on the Communist forces were also part and parcel of their strategy to maintain their hegemonic control over the landless masses in the countryside. In fact, the failures of the capitalist farmers' political agitations revealed their weakness in establishing complete hegemony over the producing classes in rural areas of the Punjab.

### **Political Science Approach**

While the socio-economic school failed to grasp the essence of qualitatively new relations of production in explaining the economic basis of Sikh ethnonationalism, the political science approach ignored the economic sphere of human activity altogether. Brass has argued that in the post-Nehruvian era, the persistent centralizing tendency coupled with the unending struggle for power in New Delhi are responsible for the failures to resolve the political problems of the non-Hindu minorities. Thus, the Punjab impasse was reached "because the struggle for power at the center of the Indian Union

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<sup>34</sup> In the past 30 years, four such coalitions, including the present government, came to form a government in the state.

<sup>35</sup> For the political economy of this struggle, see Chapters 6 and 7.

passed the limits required for the functioning of a balanced federal parliamentary system."<sup>36</sup> Bomball has also blamed the prevailing 'patron-client' pattern of center-state relations for the Punjab problem. The solution, he adds, lies in establishing a 'partnership' model of federalism.<sup>37</sup> The main focus of these studies is the federal nature of the Indian polity. The first major limitation of the centralization thesis is its failure to grasp the context of division of powers between the center and the states. The primary division of powers was between the industrial bourgeoisie, which has remained dominant in the center, and the dominant agrarian landowning classes, who remain powerful at the state level. The trend toward centralization of federal polity, especially after Indira Gandhi's rise to power in the 1960s, is rooted in the industrial and agricultural crisis of the 1960s which aggravated the contradiction between agriculture and industry<sup>38</sup>. Politically, the defeat of the 'syndicate' faction (the Kulaks) in the Congress and the party's new strategy to mobilize the Muslims and the *dalits* were responsible for the massive departure of capitalist farmers from the Congress. In response to the industrial bourgeoisie's strength in the center, the agrarian interests sought to strengthen their own sphere of jurisdiction by demanding decentralization of powers. The first to raise the issue of decentralization was not the 'non-Hindu minority' states, as Brass has claimed, but in fact the Hindu majority state of Tamil Nadu<sup>39</sup>. The agrarian interests of Tamil Nadu proposed a massive decentralization plan which was followed by demands from other states for restructuring of federal polity. While Brass has carefully selected 'non-Hindu' states like

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Brass (1994). *The Politics of India Since Independence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 201.

<sup>37</sup> K.R. Bomball (1986). Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Federal Polity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (20): 888.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>39</sup> The Rajamannar Report, commissioned by the state government of Tamil Nadu, was the first document published by a state government which dealt with "various aspects of the political, financial and economic relations between the center and the states. See, T.V. Sathyamurthy (1989). Impact of Center-State Relations on Indian Politics: An Interpretative Reckoning, 1947-87. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 (38): 2135.

Punjab for his centralization thesis, he has conveniently overlooked the similar processes in 'Hindu' majority states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal. Is he suggesting that the problems of Hindu majority regions were solved by the Indian federation? If that was the case, then India must be credited with solving the problems of over eighty per cent of its population. Yet far from this, the strong regional movements of the agrarian landed classes in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and other "Hindu" states have continued to express dissatisfaction with the central government to this date. The authors of centralization thesis have also cited the dismissal of the Akali/*Jan Sangh* government by Mrs. Gandhi upon her return to power in 1980 as a major watershed in the Punjab fiasco. It is conveniently forgotten that she dismissed eight other state governments, along with that of the Punjab, at the same time. The tactics she adopted to destabilize the *Janata* government in Karnataka were as unparliamentary, if not more, than was the case with the Punjab. Why it provoked violent agitation only in the Punjab, not in Karnataka or other states whose governments were dismissed is neither considered nor explained by the centralization thesis.

Another approach has explained Sikh ethnonationalism as an intentionally divisive political tool. The rise of the Sikh communal consciousness is traced to the Sikh reform movement of the late 19th and the early 20th century, and the British colonial patronage game.<sup>40</sup> Bal has linked the question of the rise of Sikh communalism with the divisive policies pursued by the British colonialists. Religious revivalism among the Sikhs is traced to the politics of communal quotas during the British *raj*. The quotas were established for 'major' religious groups in the system of political patronage. Thus, Bal contends that Sikh communalism, just like Hindu and Muslim communalism, generated itself as a secular, not as a religious, phenomenon through the politics of the Shiromani

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<sup>40</sup> See, Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Akali Dal.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Robinson has related the 'communal' politics of the Akali Dal with the growth of religious fundamentalism in the Punjab. He has linked the growth in Akali Dal's communalism with the erosion of the secular orientation of the Congress Party.<sup>42</sup> Both Bal and Robinson have traced the rise of Sikh ethnonationalism to the use of Sikh religion for political reasons by the Akali Dal in the secular spheres of legislative politics. Why does the Akali Dal use identity as politics? Whose interests are served by the use of this identity? Why is it that the people allow themselves to be used as 'pawns' in the 'intentionally' divisive policies of the political parties or the state? The use of identity as politics without focusing on its material context can only yield puzzling questions. The attempts to understand the British colonial policy of 'divide and rule' in isolation from the interests of various indigenous social classes, who launched campaigns in defense of the 'native' religious traditions, fail to grasp the essence of the political economy of the colonial regime. Similarly, the 'use' of religion by the Akali Dal will remain a puzzle without unmasking the economic interests behind Akali politics. The political use of Sikh identity by different economic interests at different times has produced different consequences. The political manifestations of the most recent rise in Sikh ethnonationalism indicate that this particular form of identity politics served the interests of the rich agrarian classes. How a particular religious identity came to serve the political interests of these classes, and why with such violent consequences are questions that remain to be analyzed.

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<sup>41</sup> S.S. Bal (1989). *Political Parties and Growth of Communalism in Punjab, 1920-47*. Chandigarh: Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Robinson (1987). *Religion, Class and Faction: The Politics of Communalism in Twentieth Century Punjab (India)*. D.Phil. Dissertation. University of Sussex.

## Cultural Perspective

The focus on religion has also produced studies that view the emergence of Sikh ethnonationalism as a reaction to the discriminatory state policies of the Indian state, which some have viewed as a Hindu state.<sup>43</sup> The emergence of the *Bhartya Janata Party* (BJP) as a powerful political force at the national level has given an impetus to such thinking. Embree has argued that Hinduism has been promoted as a part of the national culture by all 'secular' regimes of India since 1947.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Sikh ethnonationalism is explained as a minority reaction to protect its identity from the encroachments of a majority which controls the state power. The minority status of the Sikhs in India is also linked with economic discrimination. It has been argued that the Punjab, a Sikh majority state, did not receive its fair share from the central resource pool as it is controlled by the majority Hindu community. Dhillon contends that the modern Indian state has deliberately kept the Punjab as a non-industrial state to keep it in perpetual dependence on the rest of India. All the peaceful protests of the Sikhs to seek justice were either ignored or suppressed. Thus, the Sikhs were driven to secessionism by the 'discriminatory' policies of the Indian government.<sup>45</sup>

The focus of these studies on cultural identities is premised on the contention that political conflict in India arises out of the minority religious group's struggle for cultural survival in a state dominated by the majority Hindus. Thus, the cultural identities and the symbolic politics based on such premises became the focus of analysis. Whose interests are served by the politics of identities has remained outside the domain of such analysis.

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<sup>43</sup> See Gurharpal Singh (1995). *The Punjab Crisis Since 1984: A Reassessment. Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18 (3): 476-493; and G.S. Dhillon (1992). *India Commits Suicide*. Chandigarh: Singh and Singh Publishers.

<sup>44</sup> Anslie T. Embree (1990). *Utopias in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>45</sup> G.S. Dhillon (1992), op. cit.

The attempts to describe the Indian state as Hindu, in fact, only mask the real nature of the state. The propertied classes, be they Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims or atheists, have been served well by this allegedly 'Hindu' state. The state has crushed any threat to the interests of these classes irrespective of the religious beliefs of the agitators. In order to maintain their hegemony, the propertied classes have used religious-cultural symbolism in the same manner and frequency as they have used the symbolic order of territorial nationalism and secularism. The real issue is the content of the cultural identities or symbolic politics and who defines that content.

The focus of analysis of different studies on different variables have produced quite diverse results. The 'socio-economic' school studied the contradiction between city and countryside by focusing on the leading castes belonging to different religions. It concluded that these leading castes have invoked the religious feelings of the masses to further their own economic interests. Thus, Sikh ethnonationalism is nothing but the expression and defense of the economic interests of either the *Jatt* Sikh farmers or the *Khatri* Sikh traders. The 'normal political science' approach of Brass and Bomball focused on the center-state relations, and concluded that Sikh ethnonationalism resulted from excessive centralization of the Indian federal polity which ignored the plight of non-Hindu minorities. One school of the 'communalist' thesis holds that the rise in Sikh religious 'fundamentalism' resulted from the use of politics by the *Akali Dal*, while the other school believes Sikh ethnonationalism is a simple reaction to the hegemony of the Hindu state which threatened the survival of Sikhism. It appears that the focus of a study on a particular variable influences its conclusions<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> This focus on partial reality by academics reminds one of an ancient Indian parable. A king is said to have assembled a number of blind men who were asked to touch different parts of an elephant. The blind man who touched the leg stated that it was a tree-trunk, the one who touched the trunk stated that it was a snake, the one who touched the tail stated that it was a rope, and so on.



The 'missing link' of the above theoretical approaches is their inability to see the role of the producing classes in society. The masses are treated as passive spectators whose lives are controlled and directed by the economic, political, and intellectual power blocs. The struggles among these power blocs seem to determine the course of history. They are able to 'imagine' and 'construct' cultural identities and impose them on millions of people who have remained outside the 'modernization' process. What is denied is the people's role in making their own history under "circumstances encountered, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>47</sup> The role of the producing classes in giving birth to various cultural and religious traditions is either belittled or denied altogether. Their traditions thus appear as figments of imagination. The struggles of the producing classes against economic, political and social oppression have produced great works of art, literature and cultural practices which constitute an integral part of tradition. The question of the 'construction' or the 'imagination' of cultural identities is linked with the appropriation of this tradition by the landed classes to continue their domination and oppression of the producing classes. The construction of Sikh identity by appropriating the Sikh tradition is similarly linked with the struggles of the working people for social justice and the attempts of the propertied classes to deny that justice. The political economy perspective of Sikh identity reveals how the traditions of a movement for social justice were appropriated by the propertied interests to safeguard their economic interests.

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<sup>47</sup> S.H. Rigby (1987). *Marxism and History: A Critical Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 10.

### Chapter 3

## Sikh Identity: A Political Economy Perspective

The political economy perspective on Sikh identity takes into account two fundamental aspects of Sikhism: First, it was a radical critique of the existing social order, which appealed to and attracted the support of the producing classes, in particular the Punjabi peasantry. Second, the power blocs that emerged within Sikhism at different periods of history were instrumental in shaping the outside boundaries of the Sikhs, whether inclusionary or exclusionary. Sikhism was a part of an enlightenment movement that covered the entire Indian sub-continent. Hindu *sants* of *bhagti lehar* and Muslim *sufis* challenged a social system based on inequalities and oppression. The Sikh holy book, *Adi Granth*, compiled in 1603-04, includes the compositions of not only the first five Sikh Gurus but also the *sants* and *sufis*. The men and women of the *bhagti* movement had offered a radical critique of Brahmanism, its caste system, its rites and rituals, and social order based on these principles. As a part of this radical movement, the Sikh Gurus offered a new productive vision of human life. Thus, any attempt to analyze Sikh identity must take into account this radical departure from Brahmanism as a part and parcel of an all-India *bhakti* movement. This radical critique, which challenged the Brahmanical ideology and social order, appealed to the producing classes who found a weapon of liberation in this new vision. Like the *sants* of other regions, the Sikh Gurus preached to these producing classes in their own language, sympathized with their plight, and became an integral part of the political movement of the oppressed peasantry. The fifth and ninth Gurus were executed by the authorities for taking part in progressive movements against oppression and exploitation. Thus, the political message of the Sikh Gurus against exploitation and oppression and its appeal to the producing classes forms an integral part of the evolution of Sikh identity.

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the first Guru of the Sikhs started preaching, to the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs died, Sikhism witnessed many important social and political changes. The struggles of the peasantry, which had formed a major bloc of followers by the beginning of the seventeenth century, also brought forth an economic and social power bloc interested in the preservation of its privileged position. The question of the outer boundaries of Sikh identity is closely related to the issue of internal control by these power blocs. The first major change in this direction occurred at the time of the tenth Guru, who initiated a ceremony of baptism to create the *Khalsa*.<sup>1</sup> Such rituals had been denounced by previous Gurus as futile and unworthy. It appears that the introduction of this ritualistic tradition was an attempt on the one hand to defeat the Guru's rivals within Sikhism, and on the other to build an exclusionary identity with clearly marked boundaries for the peasant followers of the Guru in order to distinguish them from the Muslim peasantry. This attempt by the Guru to exercise direct control over the followers of Sikhism, many of whom were followers of splintered groups, marks a radical departure with the traditions established by the first Guru. However, he was not the first to depart from the egalitarian and non-ritualistic ways of Guru Nanak, the first Guru of the Sikhs. The sixth Guru had started arming his followers to preserve the privileges of the Guru's house. There were, however, no attempts similar to that of the tenth Guru to seal the boundaries of the followers of Sikhism. The religious message of first nine Gurus remained inclusionary. The founding of the *Khalsa* and the adoption of a strict non-Muslim code of conduct appear as an attempt to seal the boundaries of Sikhism to become an exclusionary sect in its relations to Islam. Islam had spread through its

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<sup>1</sup> From this moment, the followers of Sikhism came to be divided in three groups. First, the *Khalsa* Sikhs, who observe a strict dress code of five Ks: *kesh* (uncut hair), *kachha* (breeches), *kara* (steel bangle), *kanga* (comb), and *kirpan* (sword). Second, the *Keshdhari* Sikhs, who keep uncut hair but do not adhere to the strict dress code of five Ks. Third, the *Sahejdhari* Sikhs, who do not adhere to any ritual of outward appearance.

egalitarian non-caste appeal to the 'lower' classes of the society. As a result, a major part of the *Jatt* peasantry had already converted to Islam in the western Punjab. Most of the Guru's followers came from eastern Punjab's *Jatt* peasantry. Thus, the Guru's attempts appear to have focused on keeping the *Jatt* peasantry of this region away from the influence of Islam. Neither Guru Gobind nor his immediate successors, however, made any attempts to differentiate their followers from the larger "Hindu" society. In fact, Guru Gobind traced his ancestry to Hindu gods like Ram<sup>2</sup>. In his autobiography, *Bachitar Natak*, he claims that he was sent by *Brahma* to extirpate the tyrants and save *dharma*<sup>3</sup>. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that attempts were made to create a non-Hindu Sikh identity. The rise of an anti-Hindu Sikh ethnonationalism in the 1980s brought a new focus on Sikhism's relationship with Hinduism.

The debate has focused on Sikh identity in its *Khalsa* form and its relationship with the larger "Hindu" society. Oberoi<sup>4</sup> and Kapur<sup>5</sup> have argued that both the policies of the British colonialists and the activities of the Sikh and Hindu revivalists have created and strengthened the non-Hindu Sikh identity. Oberoi states that historically "most Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities", be they cult, lineage, caste, village or sect

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<sup>2</sup> The tradition narrates a story of the origin of the Sodhis, the sub-caste of Guru Gobind, and the Bedis, the sub-caste of Guru Nanak, to the sons of Lord Ram- Luv and Kushu. The Sodhis claim their lineage to Luv, the "founder" of the Punjabi city of Lahore, and the Bedis claim the lineage to Kushu, the "founder" of the Punjabi city of Kasur. See W.H. McLeod (1984). *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> ਬਚਿਤ੍ਰ-ਨਾਟਕ (Bachitar Natak) (1995). Sixth Edition. Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Harjot Oberoi (1988). From Ritual to Counter-Ritual: Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question, 1884-1915. in T.O'Connell et al, eds. *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 136-158. For more updated and detailed analysis on Sikh identity see Harjot Oberoi (1994). *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup> Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*. London: Allen and Unwin.

identities. He contends that since Indian religious traditions lacked a centralized ecclesiastical hierarchy, Indian religions could not impose universal religious identities on their followers. People prayed to local saints, gurus, and gods. They did not simply conceive themselves as Hindus or Sikhs.<sup>6</sup> It was the advent of the British rule, particularly the census taking and distribution of patronage on communal grounds, and the zeal of revivalists, that enforced and strengthened the Sikh, Muslim and Hindu identities. Thus, according to Kapur, the pre-colonial Sikh and Hindu identities "remained interlinked and overlapping."<sup>7</sup> Grewal, on the other hand, argues that the foundation of a separate Sikh identity was established by Guru Nanak, the first Guru.<sup>8</sup> The subsequent history of the Sikhs, in particular the order of the *Khalsa* promulgated by the tenth Guru, has only consolidated that identity.<sup>9</sup> The institutions of *Langar* (free community meal) and *Sangat* (Sikh congregation) established by Guru Nanak, along with his anti-Brahmanical message, are considered the foundations of a separate Sikh identity by Grewal. McLeod suggests that while many historical events have shaped the *Khalsa* form of Sikh identity, the *Sahejdhari* Hindu identity has remained an integral part of Sikh identity to date. In his evaluation of the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*<sup>10</sup>, McLeod states

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<sup>6</sup> Harjot Oberoi (1988). op. cit., pp. 137-140.

<sup>7</sup> Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). op. cit., p. xiii.

<sup>8</sup> J.S. Grewal (1990). *The New Cambridge History of India: The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Also, see Grewal (1988). *Legacies of the Sikh Past for the Twentieth Century*. in *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*. Edited by Joseph T. O'Connell et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 18-31.

<sup>9</sup> In a review article, Kaur Singh has criticized Oberoi for ignoring Sikh history. She states that "neither the Gurus nor their sacred text has any place in Oberoi's thesis." Like Grewal, she claims that the Sikh identity is firmly established with Guru Nanak, but she departs with Grewal's thesis by stating that the boundaries of the Sikh identity "were not demarcated nor have they been to date." See, Harjot Oberoi (1994). *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Book Review by Nikky-Gurinder Kaur Singh (1996). *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 55 (3): 760-762.

<sup>10</sup> The Code of Conduct is published by the elected body of the Sikhs- *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee*.

that the definition offered in this text of who is a Sikh conveniently skirts essential issues and reduces "diversity to a single simple model. The model which it offers is the normative *Khalsa* definition and it should be acknowledged...that there have always been other definitions of Sikh identity."<sup>11</sup> The debate on the emergence of Sikh identity has ignored the essence of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the appeal of their vision to the producing classes. In the hands of the oppressed peasantry, Sikhism became a source of inspiration for revolutionary movements against oppression and exploitation. As the privileged power blocs emerged within Sikhism and appropriated the tradition of this radical critique, Sikhism was turned into an empty religious shell and a source of legitimacy for their entrenched privileges. The authors on both sides of the debate have failed to grasp this material context of identity formation. Their arguments are based on the textual sources and chronological history. The interpretation of textual and historical sources remains divorced from the political economy of the times. That is why both Grewal and Oberoi are unable to explain why Sikhism inspired the peasantry to wage wars against oppression and exploitation at one time, while under the rule of Sikh *sardars* and the Sikh empire, the same peasantry was recruited in the *Khalsa* armies to wage battles to preserve and extend the privileges of Sikh gentry. The ideology of the Sikh Gurus and *sants*, which gave birth to Sikhism, played a revolutionary role as a radical critique of the unjust Brahmanical social order, but in the hands of the privileged strata it became an icon of worship. The message of enlightenment that began as an inclusionary force building bridges between the Muslim and Hindu communities became an exclusionary sect, building walls to create a different identity separate from Hindus and Muslims. Any debate on the evolution of Sikh identity must explain the essence of

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<sup>11</sup> W.H. McLeod (1989). *The Sikhs: History, Religion, and Society*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 60-61.

this transformation. Such an explanation can only be achieved by studying the material context of Sikh history.

### **Sikh History: The Guru Period**

Sikh history begins with Guru Nanak, born in a Punjabi *Khatri* ( Trading Caste) Hindu family in 1469. The Guru's teachings and the rise of Sikhism, however, can only be understood in the context of the *bhagti* movement's struggle against Brahmanism, not only in the Punjab but all over India. A message similar to that of Guru Nanak was being spread by *sants* in various parts of India, among them Jaidev of Bengal, Tirlochan and Namdev of Maharashtra, Kabir of Uttar Pradesh, and Dhanna of Rajasthan.<sup>12</sup> What the *sants* preached was a sharp attack on the major tenets of Brahmanism, in particular the caste system. By focusing on the ideology of Brahmanism, they "offered a comprehensive and immanent critique of contemporary social order."<sup>13</sup> The idle life of the Brahmins and other non-producing classes came under sharp attack. Guru Nanak praised those who earned their living with their own hands. Sikh tradition narrates a story how Guru Nanak refused to dine with a landlord (Bhago), declaring he smelled the blood of innocents from his food, but cherished the food of a poor carpenter (Lalo), whose food he compared with pure milk.<sup>14</sup> This message had a natural attraction for the producers of the material wealth. As the *sants* attracted a following among the producing classes, "the entrenched and privileged sections of the society felt threatened by the popularity of the

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<sup>12</sup> The compositions of all these *sants* and various others from all over India were included in the Sikh holy book *Adi Granth* compiled by the fifth Guru.

<sup>13</sup> Jayant Lele (1987). Jnanesvar and Tukaram: An Exercise in Critical Hermeneutics. in Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle, eds. *Religion and Society in Maharashtra*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> *ਭਗਤੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਖਾਲਸਾ* (The History of the Guru Khalsa) (1993). Third Edition, Patiala: Language Department, pp. 90-91.

message."<sup>15</sup> As a result, the authorities dealt harshly with the *sants*. Among others, Guru Nanak was imprisoned and Kabir was executed.

Guru Nanak lived in a time when *Lodhi* empire was disintegrating and the *Mughal* empire, beginning with the invasion of Babur, was in the ascendancy. All ten Sikh Gurus lived during the period of the first seven *Mughal* emperors, from Babur to Bahadur Shah. This period witnessed numerous peasant uprisings in which the Gurus played an important role. The revolts were also organized by the local economic and political power blocs to further their own interests. The administrative stability of the *Mughal* empire witnessed highs and lows, depending on the state of affairs in the *darbar*. When central authority was strong and effective, the local officials and rulers stayed loyal and obedient to the emperor. At times of uncertainty in the *darbar*, however, they took advantage of the situation to consolidate their own positions. The empire ruled through a highly centralized bureaucracy of *mansabdars* who were controlled directly by the monarch. Since they were paid servants of the emperor, they lacked a territorial base to revolt.<sup>16</sup> Administratively, the empire was divided into provinces headed by a *subedar*, which were further divided into *sarkars* (districts) and *parganas* (sub-districts). The *mansabdars* were mostly Muslims, but their sub-ordinate officers were mostly Hindus.<sup>17</sup> In Punjab, it was Hindu *Brahmins* and *Khatris* who performed these functions during both the *Lodhi* and the *Mughal* empires. Guru Nanak, a Hindu *Khatr*i, was also employed as a state functionary under the *Lodhis*.

Life basically revolved around village communities. The village elite "cultivated the largest and most fertile tracts within a village," while other lower castes "served the dominant caste in an intricate network of hereditary service and exchange

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<sup>15</sup> Jayant Lele (1987). op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Akbar's successors gave them landed estates to collect taxes in lieu of salaries. See Ramila Thapur (1977). *A History of India*. Volume 2, Middlesex: Penguin Books, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.



relationships."<sup>18</sup> Local authority was strong and brutal. The officials and the upper caste elite "enforced their demands on the peasantry with the assistance of their own forces."<sup>19</sup> Guru Nanak not only raised his voice against this exploitation and oppression but also attacked the ideological basis of the caste system, which was used by the Brahmins to justify this crude oppression. "Everyone is superior," he declared, "I can not see any inferior human beings. All are the creation of one God and only one light has illuminated the entire universe."<sup>20</sup> He advocated that human qualities must be judged on the basis of human conduct, not by invoking sacred books. The sacred texts are invoked by the Brahmins and the Mullahs to justify their misdeeds and hypocrisy:

The Qazi sitteth to administer justice;  
He turneth over his beads and invoketh God,  
But he takes bribes and doeth injustice.  
If anyone call him to account,  
he will read and cite texts.<sup>21</sup>

Declaring that the Brahmins and the Mullahs were superfluous, Guru Nanak preached that one does not need priests and middlemen to achieve God. Through inner purity and good deeds, one can connect with God. God neither resided in the temples nor in the mosques. He resided in every particle of this universe, which was His creation. The message was strikingly similar to the preaching of the *sants* of various other regions. Lalla, a fourteenth century Kashmiri poetess, wrote that "temple and image...are no better than stone; the Lord is immeasurable and consists of intelligence; what is needed to

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<sup>18</sup> John F. Richards (1987). *The New Cambridge History of India: The Mughal Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 80-81.

<sup>19</sup> Anil Chander Banerjee (1982). *The State and Society in Northern India, 1206-1526*. Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਾਣੀ (Compositions of Guru Nanak) (1983). Edited by Bhai Jodh Singh. New Delhi: National Book Trust, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Anil Chandra Banerjee (1971). *Guru Nanak and His Time*. Patiala: Punjabi University Press, p. 14.

realize Him is unified concentration of breath and mind."<sup>22</sup> Sant Namdev of Maharashtra, whose compositions are included in the Sikh holy book, wrote:

Men who are pundits shout veds,  
But the ignorant Namdev only knoweth God...  
Hindus worship their temple, the Mussalmans their mosque,  
Nama worshipeth Him who hath neither temple nor mosque.<sup>23</sup>

Guru Nanak and other *sants* fought courageously against the ignorance spread by the Brahmins and the Mullahs. In order to enlighten the masses, they wrote in the languages spoken by the people in various regions. Shunning the use of Sanskrit, a dead language, Guru Nanak preached in his native tongue- Punjabi. The use of various regional languages was an effective weapon of enlightenment in the hands of the *sants*. It was also a declaration that knowledge must not be the preserve of the selected few to oppress the majority, but it must become a weapon of liberation in the hands of the producing classes. The meaningless rites and rituals and the idle life of the Brahmins came under sharp attack from the *sants*. Ridiculing the Brahmin for his senseless meditation and idle life, Guru Nanak wrote:

You keep various idols at home. You wash them and worship them. You spray perfumes on them and present them flowers. By falling on their feet, you try to please them. But you survive by begging from fellow human beings. This is a punishment of your ignorance. Idols will neither give you food, nor will they save you from death.<sup>24</sup>

The idol worshipping and meaningless rituals of the Brahmins were also criticized by other *sants*. Kabir stated that "I do not ring the temple bell; I do not set the idol on its throne; I do not worship the image with flowers; It is not the austerities that

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in *Sources of Indian Tradition* (1958). Volume 1, Edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 354-55.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਾਣੀ (1983). op. cit., p. 128.

mortify the flesh which are pleasing to the Lord."<sup>25</sup> The *sants* also vigorously condemned the idle life of ascetics, which made them dependent on others for everything from food to shelter. The privileged sections of the society were able to buy the "blessings" of such holy men as they could afford to make large donations. The *sants*, on the other hand, shunned such dependency, and lived self-supporting productive lives.<sup>26</sup> God, according to the *sants*, could only be attained by leading productive household lives and worshipping His name in their own houses. Criticizing the *yogis* for advocating asceticism, Kabir wrote:

If Union with God be obtained by going about naked,  
All the deer of the forest shall be saved.  
They who bathe in the evening and the morning,  
Are like frogs in the water.<sup>27</sup>

The *baghti* tradition also criticized the oppression of women. Guru Nanak condemned the Brahmins for lowering the status of women. His third successor, Guru Amar Das, not only gave sanction to widow marriages but also wrote hymns for the purposes of sanctioning such unions. Thus, the people no longer had to depend upon the Brahmins who refused to give religious sanction to such re-marriages. Countering the Brahmanical attitudes toward women, Guru Nanak wrote that "we are born of women. We marry them. They are our friends and companions. Why speak ill of those who gave birth to kings. In fact, other than God, it is only the woman who creates life."<sup>28</sup> The equality of women was not only preached by the male leaders of the *bhagti* movement, but women *sants* like Meera of Gujrat and Lella of Kashmir became important leaders of this movement.

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<sup>25</sup> Cited in *Sources of Indian Tradition* (1958). op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>26</sup> In the latter part of his life, Guru Nanak took to agriculture. He cultivated land while preaching his sermons to the Sikh *sangats* of Kartarpur.

<sup>27</sup> Anil Chandra Banerjee (1971). op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> *ਸੋਲਵੀਂ ਸਦੀ ਦਾ ਚੋਣਵਾਂ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਸਾਹਿਤ* (Selected Punjabi Literature of Sixteenth Century) (1993). Edited by Dharm Pal Singhal. New Delhi: National Book Trust, p. 40.

The compositions of *sants* also carried a political commentary. They emphasized the traditional Indian idea that God re-incarnates to protect his devotees and destroys the tyrants. Witnessing the barbarity of the invading armies of the first *Mughal* emperor Babar, Guru Nanak wrote that "the marriage party of sin came from Kabul, and forced people to pay taxes. With their arrival, both religious conduct and civilized behavior disappeared. Falsehood prevails in all walks of life."<sup>29</sup> He called the kings blood-thirsty lions and their officials, dogs. He even vented his anger at God for not having mercy: "You sent the *Mughal* as a destroyer. The people are suffering from such brutalities, don't you have mercy on them....If a powerful man kills another powerful man, then one can ignore the sight. But if the powerful kills the weak, then You are answerable."<sup>30</sup>

Guru Nanak's work was carried out by his appointed successors. Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das, second and third Gurus respectively, began appointing preachers who could lead the *sangats* in hymn singing. Unlike the priestly caste of Brahminism, the new preachers came from the producing classes. As a result, the religious message of the Sikh Gurus became particularly attractive to the oppressed and the exploited. Historians note that by the early seventeenth century, especially during the time of the fourth Guru, Ram Das, a substantial proportion of the Sikhs consisted of *Jatt* peasantry.<sup>31</sup> Brutally exploited by the feudal aristocracy, the peasantry had revolted against the oppressive and exploitative system on many occasions. The appeal of Sikhism to this exploited section of the society attracted the attention of the *Mughal* authorities. Emperor Jahangir seized the opportunity to block this advance when the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, sided with his eldest son, Prince Khusro, who had rebelled against his own father. During the time of successions and power struggles in the *darbar*, it was not uncommon for local officials

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<sup>29</sup> ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਾਣੀ (1983). op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> J.S. Grewal (1972). *Essays in Sikh History: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, p. 42.

and power blocs to take sides. Guru Arjun appears to have sided with Khusro largely because of latter's enlightened views, which were similar to the Guru's own message. Imbued with the revolutionary spirit of *sufism*, Khusro had criticized the oppression and exploitation of the weaker sections of the society. "Every pearl in the royal crown is but the crystallized drop of blood fallen from the tearful eyes of the poor peasant,"<sup>32</sup> wrote Khusro. After the emperor strengthened his position by defeating the rebel prince and his supporters, he ordered the arrest and execution of Guru Arjun. The diaries of Jahangir record that it was not only Hindus but also Muslims who were attracted to the Guru's house. Jahangir wrote that a Hindu saint, Guru Arjun, was converting "the simple-minded Hindus as well as ignorant and foolish Muslims...to adopt his ways and manners."<sup>33</sup> The martyred Guru had also compiled the Sikh holy book, *Adi Granth*. Apart from the compositions of five Sikh Gurus, he included the compositions of sixteen *sants* and *sufis* as well as many other poets of his times whose ideas were imbued with the *bhagti* tradition. This speaks volumes about the proximity of Sikhism to the larger tradition of the *sant mat* and the *bhagti* movement.

The open hostility of the *Mughal* authorities after the execution of the fifth Guru and the official patronization of rival claimants to Guruship<sup>34</sup> created a challenge to the leadership of the sixth Guru. By this time, the Guru's house was relatively privileged and wealthy as donations flew from a large numbers of followers. The decision of the sixth Guru to assume martial traditions seems to have originated out of the necessity to guard that privileged position. At the ceremony of his succession to guruship, Guru Har Gobind

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<sup>32</sup> Cited in R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychandhuri and Kalikinkar Datta (1967). *An Advanced History of India*. New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 392.

<sup>33</sup> Hari Ram Gupta (1984). *History of the Sikhs: The Sikh Gurus, 1469-1708*. Volume 1, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, p. 148.

<sup>34</sup> The sons of Guru Nanak and Angad had refused to accept the guruship of the appointed Gurus. The authorities found an ally to challenge the legitimacy of the appointed Gurus, who had sided with the peasant rebels and other progressive movements.

wore two swords and declared that they signified *Miri* and *Piri* (spiritual and temporal authority).<sup>35</sup> In his compositions, Bhai Gurdas, the editor of the *Adi Granth* and a close associate of many Gurus, described the changes under the sixth Guru as follows:

The earlier Gurus sat peacefully in *dharmsalas*;  
this one roams the land.  
Emperors visited their homes with reverence;  
this one they cast into jail.  
No rest for his followers, ever active;  
their restless Master has fear of none.  
The earlier Gurus sat graciously blessing;  
this one goes hunting with dogs.  
They had servants who harbored no malice;  
this one encourages scoundrels.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from the execution of Guru Arjun, the Guru's house lived in relative peace and harmony with the local and central authorities. As most of the earlier followers of Sikhism came from the *Khatri* caste, they enjoyed a relatively privileged position as local government functionaries. But all this had changed by the time of the sixth Guru. A large number of followers now belonged to the *Jatt* peasantry.<sup>37</sup> The change was not limited to the numerical strength of the peasantry among the followers of Sikhism. The measures of Guru Hargobind brought the peasant-based leadership of the *Jatts* to prominence within Sikhism.<sup>38</sup> Guru Hargobind mobilized *Jatt* peasantry and made alliances with *Rajput rajas* of Rajsthan against the *Mughal* emperor. These attempts landed him in jail. Once out of jail, he lived in peace until his death. Neither he nor his two immediate successors,

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<sup>35</sup> From Persian, word *mir* means "an emperor, prince, lord, governor, chief, leader, the head of the family," and the word *pir* means "a guru, teacher, spiritual guide, and a saint." See Vikram Singh (1996). *Miri-Piri: The Concept of Temporal and Spiritual Sovereignty. Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, 15 (1): 84.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in W.H. McLeod (1989). *Who is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> J.S. Grewal (1972). *Essays in Sikh History: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Har Rai and Har Krishan, composed any *Bhani*. It seems that they lived in relative peace in their *deras* without any official interference.

The next major confrontation with the Guru's house came during the guruship of the ninth successor, Guru Tegh Bahadur. Contemporary historians narrate the story of rebellious peasants flocking to Tegh Bahadur on his way back to the Punjab from Bihar.<sup>39</sup> Between 1673 and 1675, the ninth Guru traveled in Malwa and Bagardesh, areas north of Delhi. These areas were one "of the backward regions of the Punjab where the peasants suffered from perpetual economic distress."<sup>40</sup> The area had already witnessed two peasant revolts in 1669 and 1672. The record of the chroniclers indicate that the Guru "took an active interest in the everyday life of the cultivators."<sup>41</sup> Guru wrote that "All human power has failed, Humanity groans in chains."<sup>42</sup> Reports reached the emperor that "the Guru is encamped with thousands of *sipahis* and that every ill-disposed person among the state functionaries has flocked to him."<sup>43</sup> The reports of peasant rebellions and the Guru's leadership angered the *Mughal* emperor Aurangzeb. Since the Guru's activities were concentrated in areas adjacent to Delhi, the impact of such rebellions on the political authority in Delhi was immediate and grave. Thus, the emperor's armies moved swiftly and strongly to stabilize the situation. The Guru was arrested and executed in Delhi in 1675.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Anil Chander Banerjee (1983). *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Religion*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, pp. 263-64.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>44</sup> The Sikh tradition narrates a different story about the execution of the ninth Guru. It holds that Tegh Bahadur was executed as a result of the Guru's challenge to the *Mughal* authorities at the head of a delegation of the Kashmiri *Pundits*. It is said that a delegation of the Kashmiri *Pundits* approached Guru Tegh Bahadur to seek his help against the *Mughal* emperor's crusade to convert them to Islam. At the head of the delegation, the Guru arrived in Delhi and challenged the authorities to convert him to Islam. If the authorities could convert him to Islam, said the Guru, then all the Kashmiri *Pundits*

At the time of Tegh Bahadur's execution, his successor son, Guru Gobind Rai, was only nine years old. He was born and raised in Patna, Bihar, and returned to Punjab only when he was an adult. By the time the tenth Guru assumed guruship of the Sikhs, the *Panth* (Sikh community) itself was not a united force. Various claimants to guruship had opened their own *deras* (abodes). Many were unhappy with the precedent of appointment established by the first Guru and continued by his successors. Denied of their hereditary right, the children of various Gurus, including the first who were known as the *Udasis*, established themselves as Gurus in opposition to the appointed Gurus. Thus, by the time of the tenth Guru, various claimants to guruship had established their *deras*, often with the help and the patronage of the local social and economic power blocs. Two of them, Dhir Mal, eldest brother of the fifth Guru, and Ram Rai, the eldest brother of the eighth Guru, were patronized directly by the *Mughal* emperors. Emperor Jahangir granted revenue-free land to Dhir Mal in Kartarpur, Punjab, and Ram Rai received a large estate in Dehra Dun in the present Uttar Pradesh from Aurungzeb. Since these dissenter groups refused to follow the tradition of a radical critique of the existing social order, and instead chose to indulge in rites, rituals and superstitions of Brahmanical proportions, they were no longer a threat to the vested interests. In fact, they became an ally of the regime. Furthermore, various appointees of the Gurus became independent and started receiving donations from the powerful local interests. Thus, they became subservient to the social and economic elite.

Upon his return to the Punjab, Guru Gobind began the task of contacting Sikh *sangats* everywhere. In order to establish his direct control over the entire Nanak-*Panth*,

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would become Muslims. In the hope of converting such a large number of Brahmins to Islam, the authorities tortured the Guru in gruesome manners. As he remained unrelenting, the authorities executed the Guru. See, ਤਵਾਰੀਖ਼ ਗੁਰੂ ਖਾਲਸਾ (History of Guru Khalsa) (1993). op. cit., pp. 720-723. The story is also narrated in Guru Gobind Singh's autobiography, *Bachitar Natak*, op. cit. (p. 58). It is possible that a combination of factors may have been responsible for the Guru's execution in 1675.



he asked his followers to come to the *Baisakhi*, a north Indian harvest festival, of 1699 in large numbers. It is here that he baptized the "five beloved", and announced the formation of the *Khalsa*. Most of the converts at this event came from the ranks of the producing classes. McLeod notes that "Brahmin and *Khatris* Sikhs were conspicuous amongst those who declined to accept the new order" and the "predominant response came from *Jats*, accompanied by smaller numbers from artisan castes."<sup>45</sup> As noted earlier, the Brahmins and *Khatris* were the clerical castes of the Punjab in the *Mughal* administration. As junior revenue officials and administrators, their interests were closely linked with the interests of the local *mansabdars* and *subedars*. The ninth Guru had openly sided with the peasant revolutionaries in the province of Sirhand and Guru Gobind was recruiting the same peasantry in his ranks. The Brahmins and *Khatris* did not want to identify themselves with the Guru's house in such an open and rebellious fashion.

The Guru wrote that his mission was to save *dharma* and extirpate all tyrants<sup>46</sup>. He gave a call to the peasantry to come under his command to fight their oppressors. The privileged strata of the society felt threatened by the Guru's activities. The first to attack the Guru were the *Rajput* Kings of the shivalik hills (now in Himachal Pradesh). In these feudal kingdoms, the *Rajputs* were *jagirdars* (landlords) and kings while the economy was "sustained by the *Rathis* and *Gujjars*, who formed a large proportion of the population."<sup>47</sup> As the Guru himself was residing in the foothills of the Shivalik hills in Anandpur Sahib, the message of the Guru spread among these producing classes. Angered by the Guru's activities, which were threatening their entrenched privileges, the *Rajput* kings banded together, along with the local *Mughal* authorities, and attacked Anandpur Sahib. The Guru left Anandpur and marched toward the Malwa area, where his father had inspired the peasants with his message of hope. Gobind fought numerous

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<sup>45</sup> W.H. McLeod (1989). op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> ਬਚਿਤ੍ਰ-ਨਾਟਕ (1995). op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>47</sup> Anil Chander Banerjee (1983). op. cit., p. 283.

battles at the head of the small peasant armies in the *suba* (province) of Sirhand. He lost his eldest two sons in the battle, while the younger two were captured, along with their grandmother, and executed by the *subedar* (governor) of Sirhand.

At this point, the Guru was invited by Aurangzeb to Delhi to negotiate a settlement. Historian Khushwant Singh suggests that the news of the death of Guru's four sons may have prompted the emperor to hope that "since he had lost everything he would be willing to submit."<sup>48</sup> From his composition *Zaffarnama* (Epistle of Victory), it appears that the Guru's intent in meeting was to press the emperor to punish the *subedar* of Sirhand who had inflicted cruelties on his family members and followers.<sup>49</sup> Guru Gobind went to Delhi, but there seems to be no evidence of any meeting with the emperor as Aurangzeb died. After the death of Aurangzeb, Bahadur Shah became the emperor. Guru Gobind went to Agra to pay him a visit and accompanied the new emperor on his military mission to crush rebellions in the south.<sup>50</sup> As the Guru's party came and encamped at Nanded, Maharashtra, an hireling of Wazir Khan, *subedar* of Sirhand, stabbed the Guru.<sup>51</sup> Unable to recover from serious wounds, Guru Gobind succumbed to his injuries on October 7, 1708. While in Nanded, the Guru made an important announcement regarding his successor. He appointed the Sikh holy book, *Adi Granth*<sup>52</sup>, as the Guru for eternity and stated that the Sikhs must seek spiritual guidance from the holy book. The practical decisions were to be taken by the *Khalsa sangats*. Their decisions were binding on the individual members of the *sangat*. Guru declared the *Khalsa* to be the heir of everything he possessed, because he himself owed everything to

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<sup>48</sup> Khushwant Singh (1963). *History of the Sikhs*. Volume 1, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 93.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>52</sup> Guru Gobind Singh added the compositions of his father, Tegh Bahadur, to the text prepared by the fifth Guru. Though he composed numerous hymns and poetry, he never added his own compositions in the *Adi Granth*.

them.<sup>53</sup> He also decided to send his most able warrior Banda Bahadur to the Punjab to lead the peasants of Sirhand against the *subedar*. Though he had continued to negotiate with Bahadur Shah, the Guru sent Banda "to rouse the peasantry in the event the negotiations failed."<sup>54</sup> The *subedar* of Sirhand, Wazir Khan, managed to assassinate the Guru before any deal could be reached with the emperor. Wazir Khan, however, was unable to avoid the wrath of Banda and his followers.

### **The Post-Guru Period**

Banda Bahadur came to the Malwa region of the Punjab, where the ninth Guru had provided guidance to the peasant revolutionaries and the tenth Guru had fought most of his battles. He mobilized the peasantry of the Malwa and stormed the province of Sirhand with a strong force, eliminating *Mughal* authority within three years of Guru Gobind Singh's death. Banda Bahadur established the first Sikh state in the eastern parts of the Punjab in 1711. He issued coins in the name of Guru Nanak and issued *Fermans* (Royal Proclamations) as the servant of the *Panth*, not as a King or a governor. The leadership of Banda's army came mainly from the poor peasantry and other "lower castes."<sup>55</sup> Wherever Banda established his rule, he "abolished the *zamindari* (landlordism) system and established peasant-proprietorship making the actual tillers of the soil its masters."<sup>56</sup> Thus, the first major land-reform act in the Punjab was carried out by the Sikh state under Banda. The challenge of the Sikh revolt to *Mughal* authority was such that extreme measures were put in place to end this rebellion. When emperor

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<sup>53</sup> J.S. Grewal (1990). op. cit., pp. 77-78.

<sup>54</sup> Khushwant Singh (1963), p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> A British writer observed that "a low scavenger or leather dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), when in a short time he would return to his birth-place as its ruler with his order of appointment in his hand." Quoted in Khushwant Singh (1963). op. cit., p. 108

<sup>56</sup> Hari Ram Gupta (1978). *History of the Sikhs*. Volume 2, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, p. 37.

Farrukh Siyar ascended the throne in 1713, he issued a general order that the Sikhs should be exterminated.<sup>57</sup> Under the command of their most able commandants, the authorities launched major expeditions to capture Banda and his followers. Finally in June 1716, Banda, along with his senior military commanders, was arrested and brutally put to death, along with his four year old son- Ajay Singh. From now onward, the Sikhs were to fight the most ferocious battles against the *Mughal* authorities and the Afghan invaders, in the face of frequently updated orders to exterminate them. According to McLeod, "this is the heroic period of Sikh history and from it emerge traditions of bravery and endurance which still fire the modern *Panth*."<sup>58</sup> It is also a period of high moral and ethical behavior and strict discipline. Unlike the armies of the landlords, the peasant armies displayed marked sense of discipline, civility and moral conduct. Even a fanatic Muslim writer of the period, Qazi Nur Mohammed, who calls the Sikhs "dogs" throughout his works, had nothing but praise for their moral character. The Sikhs "do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid servant. There is no adulterer among them, nor are they given to thieving. They never kill in battle those who lay down arms or otherwise refuse to resist and fight."<sup>59</sup>

After the death of Banda, the Sikh armies dispersed in several *misls*<sup>60</sup> led by *sardars* (leaders). By the second half of the eighteenth century, various Sikh *Sardars* had established their rule, often, only in few villages. Apart from the income from their own estates, they charged *rakhi*, a tribute, from other landed interests who depended on the security provided to them by the *sardars*. The main purpose of these highly scattered and factionalized *Khalsa* armies came to be the defense of their privileges. In alliance with other forces of feudal landlords, they fought to extend their estates and tributaries. In

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<sup>57</sup> J.S. Grewal (1990), op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> W.H. McLeod (1989), op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> Qazi Nur Mohammed (1765). *Jangnama*. cited in G.S. Dhillon (1996). Sikh Polity. *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, April-June: 56-57.

<sup>60</sup> An Army formation.

stark contrast to the forces of Banda, the *Khalsa* armies of these *misls* became "hordes of robbers" and created anarchy in the Punjab as they "turned against each other."<sup>61</sup> Some Sikh leaders even had agreements with the Afghan invaders, especially with Ahmed Shah Abdali who had destroyed the Golden Temple, to enhance their power and corner their opponents.<sup>62</sup>

Most of the present *rehatnama* (code of conduct) seems to have originated in the post-Guru period leading up to the establishment of the Sikh rule by the dispersed Sikh *Misls*. Though the fighting armies observed a strict *Khalsa* tradition, there is no evidence that the dispersed Sikh elite made any attempts to distinguish Sikh identity from the prevailing "Hindu" identity. There was, however, a deliberate attempt to foster an anti-Muslim sense among the followers of Sikhism. The *rehatnama* particularly prohibited Sikhs from smoking tobacco<sup>63</sup>, eating beef and *halal* meat, and having any contact with Muslim women. It was a vision to compete for power. Islam, especially its *sufi* form, also appealed to the "lower castes" and promised equality. It appears that the Sikh elite, while making egalitarian appeals, realized that in order to maintain control over their followers, a break with Islamic tradition was necessary. The creation of the *Khalsa* and the emergence of a non-Muslim code of conduct for the followers of Sikhism were certainly attempts in that direction. Once powerful interests emerged to compete for power with the Muslims, Sikhism seized to be a radical critique. The Sikh *dharmsalas*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Khushwant Singh (1963). op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>62</sup> The most notable among them was the Maharaja of Patiala, who even had an agreement with Ahmed Shah Abdali.

<sup>63</sup> Smoking tobacco with Turkish *hookah* was also an act of socialization. Men gathered together in the village *saths* for social gatherings and smoked from the same *hookah*. The prohibition from smoking tobacco thus appears as an attempt to separate the followers of Sikhism from the Muslims.

<sup>64</sup> A Punjabi *sufi* poet, Bulley Shah (1679-1757), wrote that "*Dharmsalas* are occupied by the brutes; while the cheats reside in (Hindu) *Thakurduars*; the liars live in the Mosques; while the true lovers of God live apart from all of them."

ਬੁਲਿਆ ਪਰਮਸਾਲਾ ਪੜਵਾਈ ਰਹਿੰਦੇ, ਠਾਕਰ ਦੁਆਰੇ ਠੱਗ

became centers of idol worshipping, where, along with the Sikh holy book, various Hindu idols were kept for the purposes of *pooja*. The *Adi Granth* itself became a symbol of idol-worshipping. If the Brahmins performed services at *akhand Ramayan* (uninterrupted reading of the *Ramayan*), the Sikh priestly class started performing *akhand path* (uninterrupted reading of the *Adi Granth*). Thus, the revolutionary compositions of the Gurus, *sants* and *sufis* became icons for ritualistic reference. Meaningful critique of Brahmainism gave way to rites and rituals of Brahmanical nature. The *Udasis*, who were shunned by the Gurus for not following the *sant* and *bhagti* traditions, came to control the Sikh *dharmsalas*. Along with other Hindu idols, which they installed in these premises, the *Udasis* ritualized the entire Sikh worshipping. Thus, the content of the *Adi Granth* as a radical critique found no expression in the sermons, the rites and rituals of this priestly class.

The power of these Sikh centers increased with the success of the Sikh armies from the middle of the eighteenth century until the faith came to be patronized by the second Sikh state under Ranjit Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh established his rule after defeating most of the Sikh and Muslim rulers of the Punjab west of river Satluj. For the producing classes, the second Sikh empire was not much different from the *Mughal* rule. The power and privileges of most of the Muslim *mansabdars* and *jagirdars* remained intact, much like the privileges of the Hindu and Sikh *jagirdars*. The anti-Muslim tone of the post-Guru period also disappeared as the Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim *jagirdars* became the ruling class in a 'peaceful' alliance.<sup>65</sup> The political and economic administration of

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ਵਿੱਚ ਮਸੀਤਾਂ ਕੁਸ਼ਤੀਏ ਵਸਦੇ, ਆਸ਼ਕ ਰਹਿਣ ਅਲੱਗ

See, ਕਲਾਮ ਬੁੱਲੇ ਸ਼ਾਹ (Poetry of Bulley Shah) (1992). Edited by Gurdev Singh, Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop, p. 96.

<sup>65</sup> An example of how the content of identity is shaped by the vested interests of the power blocs was provided by the story of the foundation of the Golden Temple. The Sikh tradition holds that the foundation of the Golden Temple was laid by a Muslim *Pir*, Mian Mir. The story seems to have originated during the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The battles fought between the *Khalsa* armies and the Muslim rulers created animosities

the state was similar to the *Mughal* state.<sup>66</sup> The empire was divided into eight provinces, which were further divided into *parganas* (districts) and *talukas* (sub-districts). Each province was headed by a *nazim*, who had to pay a fixed annual amount to the Maharaja.<sup>67</sup> The revenue collection system of the Maharaja was highly "secular." Each province and district was given to the highest bidder, irrespective of *jagirdar's* religion. In order to pay high tributes to the central authorities, the local chiefs extracted as much revenue as possible. A contemporary historian observed that Ranjit Singh "framed out the country to contractors. They sucked the blood of *Jatts*....They were extremely cruel in recovering dues."<sup>68</sup> Like the *Mughal jagirs*, the titles to land were not hereditary. Thus, the *jagirdars* indulged in extravagant lifestyles after paying the necessary tributes to the treasury. A study observed that the "chiefs and nobles led a licentious life. Excessive addiction to wine and women was their general weakness."<sup>69</sup>

Though Ranjit Singh observed the *Khalsa* dress code for outer appearance, his conduct remained similar to any other Hindu kings of his times. He made annual pilgrimages to Hardwar and other Hindu holy sites, and donated large amounts of gold and diamonds to various Sikh and Hindu shrines. Although Hindu and Sikh shrines received most of Maharaja's donations, the Muslim mosques and religious centers were also patronized. He married over twenty Hindu *Rajput* girls and, contrary to teachings of the Sikh Gurus, several of his wives committed *sati* (self-immolation) on his funeral pyre. With his death in 1839, however, the Sikh empire declined. The palace coups and

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between the two communities. The above story appear as an attempt to build bridges between the Muslims and the Sikhs as the class rule of the Sikh and Muslim *jagirdars* demanded enmity.

<sup>66</sup> Ranjit Singh also continued the use of *Farsi* as the official language of the state.

<sup>67</sup> Hari Ram Gupta (1978). *History of the Sikhs*. Volume 5, Delhi: Munshiram Mahoharlal Publishers, p. 339.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>69</sup> Harjot Oberoi (1994). *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 208.

factional-feuds gave the British an opportunity that they had been waiting for. In 1849, after conquering the Punjab, they completed their occupation of the entire Indian sub-continent.

From the time of the birth of the *Khalsa* in 1699, the Sikh power blocs continued to press for an exclusionary *Khalsa* identity. However, this identity remained exclusionary only in relation to the Muslims. The Sikhs, including both the *Khalsa* and the *sahejdhari*<sup>70</sup>, remained an integral part of the Hindu society. The fighting contingent of the Sikh *misl*s and Ranjit Singh's armies observed a strict *Khalsa* tradition while ordinary Sikhs remained *sahejdhari* Hindus. Often, both belonged to the same families as the *Khatri* Hindus baptized their first born son as the *Khalsa*, the protector of the faith. The necessity for strict anti-Muslim *Khalsa* code had arisen out of competition between the Muslim and the Sikh power blocs who were making appeals to the poor peasantry for conversion. The issue of building walls around exclusive Sikh identity in its relation to Hinduism did not arise. The Sikhs continued to live in the fold of the larger Hindu society as one of its many different segments.<sup>71</sup> The difference between the Sikhs and Hindus was non-existent to the extent that in their first census of the Punjab in 1855, the British officials excluded the Sikhs and only recorded Hindus and Muslims.<sup>72</sup> The Sikhs started receiving attention only after their role in crushing the 1857 rebellion against the British. As the British authorities came under heavy attacks of the patriotic forces in Delhi and other places, Sikh Maharajas of Jind, Nabha and Patiala came to the rescue of the British with their forces. Earlier they had been saved from the marching armies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by the British through the Satluj treaty. Now they paid their debt

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<sup>70</sup> Those who do not observe the *Khalsa* dress code of five Ks.

<sup>71</sup> Despite his lack of understanding of the material context of history, Harjot Oberoi (1994) has made a great contribution to the debate on Sikh identity by showing how ordinary Sikhs lived as a part of the local caste, cult and village identity. There were no clear cut demarcation lines on the basis of religious identities.

<sup>72</sup> Harjot Oberoi (1994), p. 210.



to the British colonialists by sending Sikh soldiers to crush the first war of independence against the British.

### **The Modern Period**

British rule was to rest on an important pillar- the feudal gentry. When the British conquered the Punjab in 1849, British industrial capital enjoyed a dominant position in the capitalist world economy. The immediate emphasis of British administrators on the agricultural development in the Punjab indicated that the land of the five rivers would be "developed as an agricultural appendix" to the capitalist economy.<sup>73</sup> A scheme of developing infrastructure and enacting new legislation to boost agricultural production occupied the immediate attention of the British administrators in the Punjab. In this respect, their view of the Sikh gentry was not favorable. It was considered "a class of people who were parasites on the land, feeding off a surplus generated by hardy peasant proprietors."<sup>74</sup> However, the role of the Sikh princely states and the landed gentry in crushing the first war of independence in 1857 changed British perceptions. With the introduction of the land settlement acts, the British gave the gentry permanent titles to the lands which had always belonged to the crown during the *Mughal* and the Sikh empires. The land became a commodity, like any other commodity, to buy and sell. In the process of eliminating hostile chiefs of the Ranjit Singh's armies and the establishment of new canal colonies, peasant proprietorship also increased. The "privilege" of selling and mortgaging of the land under new settlement laws, however, increased the creditworthiness of the land. As a result, the peasants borrowed heavily from the moneylenders to pay land revenues in cash. By 1891, four million acres of land

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<sup>73</sup> Harish K. Puri (1993). *Gadhar Movement: Ideology, Organization, Strategy*. Second Edition, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Harjot Oberoi (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 217.

was under mortgage in Punjab.<sup>75</sup> The inability of the peasants to pay debts led to the "conversion of proprietors into tenants-at-will and agricultural laborers. Between 1872-73 and 1902-03, the number of tenants-at-will increased by 360 per cent."<sup>76</sup>

The upheavals in the agrarian sector were threatening the stability of the privileged regime of the landed gentry and British colonial rule. In the 1870s, a powerful anti-colonial movement, known as the *Kuka Lehar*, led by Baba Ram Singh surfaced in the countryside. The movement sought to re-establish the *Khalsa raj* and drive the British out of the Punjab. The authorities moved quickly and cruelly to quell the rebellion by executing all the active members of the movement and exiling Baba Ram Singh to Burma. The movement was short lived, but it reminded the British and their allies that the anti-colonial forces could make use of their revolutionary traditions to unite the people against colonial rule. The *Kuka Lehar's* anti-Christian crusade against "beef-eaters" also sent a signal to the landed gentry that the activities of the Christian missionaries in the countryside could spell potential disaster. The Hindu, Sikh and Muslim landed gentry's own position would be threatened by a peasantry converted to Christianity. For Hindu-Sikh landlords, as well as for the Muslims, the role of religion as an ideology to build 'common' bonds between them and the peasantry was vital in keeping their hegemony. The rise of the religious reform movement in the 1870s in the Punjab must be viewed in this context.

Organized and financed by the Sikh gentry, the Sikh reform movement attracted a large number of educated urban *Khatri* Sikhs. As modern education facilities spread in the British *raj*, the sons of urban Sikh traders and the Sikh rural gentry were the first to enjoy this privilege. The urban Sikhs became the propagandists of the reform movement while the gentry paid for their activities. Apparently disturbed by the activities of the

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<sup>75</sup> Harish K. Puri (1993). op. cit., pp. 13-14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Christian Missionaries, who were able to convert a large number of lower castes to Christianity, Sikh reformers began the task of sealing the boundaries of their religion to ward off any challenge from this foreign faith. Swamy Dayanand, the founder of the *Arya Samaj*, was doing similar work in his native Gujrat. He advocated reforms in Hinduism to rid the 'caste-based' religion of 'social evils,' including untouchability. Sensing a similar message, the Sikh leaders invited the *Arya Samajis* to Punjab for a common crusade. They, along with the *Arya Smajis*, performed *shudi* (to purify) rituals to bring the converts back to Hinduism or Sikhism. But the future course of events was to take a different turn.

If religious differences between Hindus and Sikhs were weakest in any one segment of the society, it was among the peasantry. The hard life of peasants made it difficult to observe the rituals of the *Khalsa* dress code. In the absence of the *Khalsa* identity, Hindu and Sikh peasants were indistinguishable. They worshipped in the same places of worship and observed same religious traditions. The Sikh and Hindu gentry was well aware of this reality. Thus, the Sikh gentry continued to support not only the *Singh Sabhas* but also the *Arya Samaj* and *Brahmo Samaj*.<sup>77</sup> Along with the *Arya Samajis*, the Sikh reformers stressed the point that Indian religions and Indian religious traditions were able to provide solutions to such problems as untouchability. Thus, there was no need for the 'lower castes' to convert to Christianity to escape the evils of the caste-system. The Sikh gentry, however, made no attempts to demarcate Sikh identity from its relationship with Hinduism. They were convinced that the Sikhs could live as one of numerous non-Muslim and non-Christian religious sects. Until the nineteenth century, no one had even suggested that all non-Muslim and non-Christian faiths of the Indian sub-

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<sup>77</sup> Majhithias, the founders of the Tribune Trust which publishes the daily *Tribune*, were one of the early supporters of the *Brahmo Smaj* and the *Arya Smaj*. However, they were not the only Sikh landlords who patronized these Hindu organizations. *Shaheed* Bhagat Singh's family had close connections with the *Arya Samaj*.

continent were a part of one Hindu community. Thus, the question of denying any association with an all-inclusive Hindu community did not even arise. Though their numbers were small, the Sikhs controlled far more land in the Punjab than the Hindus and Muslims. Thus, it was in the interest of the Sikh gentry to present itself as patriarch heads of both Hindus and Sikhs. The views of the urban petty-bourgeois Sikhs were different. They had to compete for limited trade opportunities and government jobs in the colonial administration with their Hindu counterparts. As a separate community entitled to separate quotas, they had most to gain. But as a part of the larger Hindu society, they would receive only a marginal share as they represented only a small segment of the urban petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Thus, in order to safeguard its interests, the Sikh petty-bourgeoisie began propagating a separate Sikh identity distinct from Hindus.

The fuel was provided by the campaigns of the *Arya Samajis*. According to the *Arya Samajis*, the Sikh religion was a militant challenge of Hinduism to Islam. As there was no need to defend Hinduism from the *Mughal* tyranny anymore, the continued existence of Sikhism was superfluous. In the war of words, which was aided by the newly acquired print media, the urban Sikh petty bourgeoisie and its Hindu counterparts began hurling abuse at each other. The *Arya Samajis* continued to press that the Sikhs were a part of the Hindu society and the *Singh Sabhas* continued to deny this association. For the first time in their history, a Sikh scholar, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, published a text declaring that the Sikhs were not Hindus.<sup>78</sup> Nabha wrote that the primary objective of his book was to make the Sikhs realize that the "Sikh religion is different from Hindu religion, and that the Sikhs are a separate nation like other nations."<sup>79</sup> Kapur argues that in the British colonial patronage game, seen as part of a much larger Hindu community, the Sikhs and their leaders were of little consequence, but as a distinct minority group

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<sup>78</sup> Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha (1995). *ਓਹ ਫਿਰ ਨਹੀਂ* (We are not Hindus). Amritsar: Singh Brothers.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

they had a platform from which to fight.<sup>80</sup> After Morely-Minto reforms of 1909, which awarded the Muslims separate electorates, Sikh reformers began pressing for similar recognition and awards. Their demand for special representation was accepted in principle in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms.<sup>81</sup> The British thus accepted the religious communities of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as the three main political players.

Though the Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie did all the work of arousing communal passions among the Sikhs, the British only invited the representatives of the Sikh gentry to sit as representatives of the Sikhs. The urban Sikh interests needed a platform independent of the Sikh gentry. It was provided to them by the *Gurdwara Sudhar Lehar* (temple reform movement). From 18th century, the Sikh shrines and temples were under the control of Hindu *Mahants*, most of whom were followers of the elder son of Guru Nanak. Once a dominant group during the time of the Gurus, the Sikh *Khatris* claimed that it was their birthright to control the Sikh shrines and temples. Thus, the Sikh petty bourgeoisie began a campaign against the "corrupt" management of the Hindu *Mahants*. The opportunity was provided by the events related to the anti-colonial movement which erupted after World War I. The urban petty bourgeoisie came under the leadership of the Indian industrial bourgeoisie in its struggle against the colonial capital. The Sikh petty bourgeoisie played a vital role in mobilizing the Sikh peasantry in this freedom movement. The Sikh gentry, on the other hand, continued to give unconditional support to the colonial regime. They applauded the British authorities for crushing the revolutionary *Gadhar* movement, which had originated among the Indian emigres in the Pacific coast of North America, during World War I. When the nationalist forces protested against the brutalities of the British regime after the *Jalian Wala Bag* massacre

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<sup>80</sup> Rajiv A. Kapur (1986). *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*. London: Allen and Unwin, p. xiii.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-77.

of peaceful protesters in Amritsar in 1919, the Sikh gentry invited General Dyer, who had ordered the shooting, to the Golden Temple and honored him with a *Sirapao* (an honor bestowed by giving a piece of saffron cloth). Earlier the gentry had refused the entry of newly converted 'lower' caste Sikhs, who were accompanied by the petty bourgeois reformers, into the Golden Temple. These events gave ammunition to the reformers who called for the ouster of "corrupt" *Mahants*. The reformers mobilized the Sikh peasantry, especially the middle and small peasants, in this crusade to liberate the temples from *Mahants*.

The movement gave birth to a militant wing, Akali Dal (Party of the Immortals). The Akali Dal was formed at the end of 1920 to liberate the Sikh shrines through mass non-violent struggle, and received support from Mahatma Gandhi. The liberated shrines were put under the control of a newly created organization, the *Shirmani Gurdwara Prabandhik* Committee (the higher committee of the temple management). This reform movement brought the Sikhs in direct confrontation with the British as the officials came to the defense of the status quo in the management of the Sikh shrines. In order to maintain its popularity among the peasantry, the movement also directed the attention of the agitators on the growing debt and the increasing poverty of the peasantry.<sup>82</sup> In his report to the government, the Commandant of the Jalandhar Brigade wrote that the Sikhs involved in the shrine reform movement were "contemplating the possibility of refusal to pay revenue."<sup>83</sup> As the movement spread, the Akali Dal and the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik* Committee (SGPC) were declared unlawful associations. The members of these organizations were "arrested and charged with treason against the

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<sup>82</sup> A 1925 study revealed that only 17 per cent of the cultivators were debt free. The total debt represented twelve times the land revenue paid by all cultivators. See Malcolm Darling (1925). *The Punjab Peasant: In Prosperity and Debt*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Shive Kumar (1979). *Peasantry and the Indian National Movement, 1919-1933*. Meerut: Anu Prakashan, p. 42.

King-Emperor."<sup>84</sup> These measures only fueled the agitation. The government finally bowed to the pressure of the agitators and accepted their demand of handing over the management of all the Sikh shrines in the Punjab to the SGPC. Moved as a Private Member's bill, the *Gurdwara Act* was adopted by the Punjab Legislative Council on July 8, 1925, and came into force on November 1, 1925.<sup>85</sup> Among other things, the *Gurdwara Act 1925* defined a Sikh as one who made the following declaration: "I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the ten Gurus and I have no other religion."<sup>86</sup> For the first time in history, a definition of who is a Sikh was contemplated. The definition, however, said nothing about the *Khalsa* or *Sehjdhari* identities of the Sikhs.

Most of the 20th century religious and political activity of the Sikhs has centered around the two organizations- the Akali Dal and the SGPC- that came into being as a result of *Gurdwara* reform movement.<sup>87</sup> The SGPC is a democratically-elected body that manages all the Sikh shrines and temples in the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh from its headquarters within the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Since its inception, it has remained in the hands of the Akali Dal. As the Sikh gentry had opposed the movement for the 'liberation' of shrines, it had virtually no influence in the newly created organizations. The new leadership was largely under the control of the urban *Khatri* Sikhs, typified by Master Tara Singh, and sections of the middle and the rich peasantry. Although the urban petty-bourgeois Sikh reformers had vigorously pursued the cause of the *Khalsa* identity, the presence of a large number of peasants in the reform movement

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<sup>84</sup> J.S. Grewal (1996). *The Akalis: A Short History*. Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publications, p. 50.

<sup>85</sup> Karnail Singh (1996). Sikh Gurdwaras in History and Role of Jhabbar. *Abstract of Sikh Studies*, April-June: 94.

<sup>86</sup> The Gurdwara Act 1925, (Appendix 4) in Major A.E. Barstow (1928). *The Sikhs: An Ethnology*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing, p. 212.

<sup>87</sup> See Chapter 4.

turned it into a non-issue. Hence its exclusion from the definition of a Sikh in the *Gurdwara Reform bill*. Under the influence of the reformers, the British had made it a condition for all the Sikh recruits and officers of the Armed Forces to observe the *Khalsa* dress code. However, once the recruits returned to their native villages and took up agriculture, they found it difficult to observe the *Khalsa* dress code, especially uncut hair.<sup>88</sup> The issue of the *Khalsa* identity has remained important only for the urban *Khatris* Sikhs. As a number of Hindu *Khatris* still baptize their eldest son as the *Khalsa* Sikh, and both Hindu and Sikh *Khatris* intermarry on cross religious lines but within the caste, the only line of demarcation for the *Khatris* Sikhs is the *Keshdhari* status. Puri noted that the "fear of assimilation has largely been among the *Khatris* Sikhs."<sup>89</sup> That is why they have been the most vigorous champions for maintaining the *Khalsa* identity<sup>90</sup>. The literature produced by the Sikh organizations dominated by the urban Sikh petty bourgeoisie continued to hammer the point that only the *Keshdhari Khalsa* is a true Sikh. By definition *Sehajdhari* means a slow adopting Sikh, it is thus concluded that the ultimate aim must be to become *Khalsa*. The primary aim of this literature was to show how the Sikhs differ from Hindus not only in their religious conduct but also in social and cultural life. Between 1884 and 1915 at least twenty-four manuals were produced by the Sikh reformers to "determine what sort of life-cycle rituals should be performed by

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<sup>88</sup> The *Khalsa* code of conduct requires individuals to not only keep uncut hair and beard but also wash them in the early morning hours on a daily routine. It is possible for the shopkeepers, traders and professionals to observe such rituals but the busy and sweaty life of a peasant makes it practically impossible to observe these rituals.

<sup>89</sup> Harish K. Puri (1983). *The Akali Agitation: An Analysis of Socio-Economic Basis of Protest. Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 (4): 114.

<sup>90</sup> While the Kulaks controlled SGPC has maintained the old liberal definition of a Sikh incorporated in the 1925 legislation, the Delhi *Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee* (DGPC) under the control of the urban petty-bourgeois Sikhs has changed the definition of a Sikh to include the *Khalsa* identity. Whereas anyone with a simple declaration that he/she is a Sikh can vote in the SGPC elections, only the *Keshdhari Khalsa* Sikhs can do so in the DGPC elections.



the Sikhs."<sup>91</sup> The *Sikh Rehat Maryada* produced by the SGPC<sup>92</sup> gives detailed do's and don'ts of Sikhs' individual and corporate life. It tells the Sikhs when to rise, what hymns to sing, what to wear, what to eat and how to conduct themselves in social and religious life.<sup>93</sup> A strict orthodox guide is produced by the mentor and predecessor of the Sikh militant leader Bhindrawale with a view to create a separate class of Sikh preachers and priests. The Bhindrawale *Rehat Maryada* is more strict and ritualistic. It bans the use of such 'aphrodisiacs' as garlic and onions for Sikh priests.<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, we can see that historically the question of Sikh identity has been closely linked with the interests of the power blocs within Sikhism. The political and economic elite that emerged within the revolutionary tradition of the *bhagti* movement has defined the contents of Sikh identity. Whether it was a question of defining Sikhism's relationship with Islam or Hinduism, the power blocs within Sikhism have helped shaped the outside boundaries of Sikh identity. It must not be concluded, however, that they were successful in enforcing their vision of Sikh identity on the Sikh masses. The traditions produced by the common struggles of the producing classes from all religious backgrounds frustrated the attempts of the power blocs to build exclusionary identities. When Guru Gobind proclaimed that henceforth every Sikh shall be a *Khalsa* Sikh, a major portion of the Sikh followers did not adopt this new identity. The power blocs within Sikhism were also divided on laying emphasis on a common identity. While Banda and his followers in the Sikh *mists* continued to promote an anti-Muslim *Khalsa* Sikh identity until the middle of the eighteenth century, the Maharaja of Patiala, who had

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<sup>91</sup> Harjot Oberoi (1988). op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>92</sup> The SGPC continues to use the code of conduct produced by the reformers under the influence of the urban Sikh petty-bourgeoisie.

<sup>93</sup> See *Sikh Rehat Maryada: The Code of Sikh Conduct and Conventions*. Amritsar: Dharm Parchar Committee (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee), 1994.

<sup>94</sup> Sant Giani Gurbachan Singh Ji Khalsa (1989). *Gurmit Rayat Maryada*. Ferozepur: Giani Mohan Singh Ji Bhindrawale, p. 320.

close relations with the Muslim authorities, did not take any part in that common crusade. The end result of all these campaigns for an exclusionary Sikh identity has been a mixture of successes and failures. It helps explain why a century later Sikh identity remains interlinked with Hindu identity in the Punjab.

The textual sources alone, divorced from their material context, cannot explain the dialectical process of the formation of Sikh identity. For each historical period of identity study, the historian must ask: Who defined the content of the identity? Whose interests were served in the propagation of such identity formation? Why does emphasis on certain form of identity features shift under different circumstances? If the Sikh reformers were propagating a non-Hindu Sikh identity at the end of the nineteenth century, the Kulaks based Sikh leadership launched a campaign of anti-Hindu Sikh identity in the 1980s. What has changed? The answer must be found in the study of the political economy of these different times. This chapter has dealt with the political economy of the historical formation of Sikh identity. The new emphasis on anti-Hindu Sikh identity must also be found in the study of the modern political economy. For the past three decades, the Punjab political economy has been shaped by the successes and failures of the green revolution. The study of the political economy of the green revolution within the context of the national and international political economy is vital in understanding the present Sikh ethnonationalism.

## Chapter 4

### The Political Economy of the Green Revolution

For the past three decades, the political economy of the state, to a large extent, has been shaped by the capitalistic transformation in agriculture. The transition to capitalism, which began in the 1950s, set the process in motion that divorced the producer from the means of production, the land<sup>1</sup>. The ratio of the landless workers in the total agricultural workforce rose from 17.3 per cent in 1961 to 32.1 per cent in 1971, and more than 40 per cent in 1980<sup>2</sup>. The annual growth rate of male agricultural labor in the state was 3.1 per cent compared with 0.9 per cent for all-India between 1971 and 1981.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the percentage of the small farmers witnessed a steady decline. Between 1953-54 and 1971-72, those operating 2.5 acres, or less, declined from 32.2 per cent to 14.4 per cent.<sup>4</sup> This capitalistic transformation also set in motion the phenomenon of concentration which reflected in the concentration of land and other assets in the hands of a minority. As a result of the buying and selling fueled by the green revolution, land prices soared. The value of land in real terms had remained stagnant up till 1965-66, but it tripled in the next 13 years.<sup>5</sup> The wealth of the rich farmers continued to increase at a time when tens of thousands of small and marginal peasants were being stripped of their tiny plots. By the early 1980s, more than 75 per cent of all agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> The primitive accumulation also took place with the advent of the British colonial rule that linked the agriculture to the world capitalist market. It was, however, qualitatively different than the primitive accumulation under the command of the bourgeois state. See, pp. 63-64.

<sup>2</sup> Gopal Singh (1984). Socio-Economic Basis of the Punjab Crisis. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (1): 42.

<sup>3</sup> G. Parthasarathy (1987). Changes in the Incidence of Rural Poverty and Recent Trends in Some Aspects of Agrarian Economy. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 42 (1): 13.

<sup>4</sup> G.K. Chadha (1986). *The State and Rural Economic Transformation: The Case of Punjab, 1950-85*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 345.

<sup>5</sup> H.S. Shergill (1986). Land Sales and Land Prices in Punjab, 1952-53 to 1978-79. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (38 & 39): 1690.

wealth, including land and movable assets, was in the hands of only 10 per cent of the rural households while the poorest 70 per cent of the households possessed less than 7 per cent of all assets.<sup>6</sup>

The surplus from agriculture has gone to satisfy the capitalist farmers' insatiable thirst for consumer products, on the one hand, and the acquisition of land and machinery, on the other. What has been problematic is the transition of capital from agriculture to industry. The transition was possible in three different spheres: (i) leading edge electronics industries, (ii) traditional heavy industries, and (iii) consumer agro-processing industries. It is only in the agro-processing sector that the state has made some headway<sup>7</sup>. In terms of its share of all-India production and market in agro-processing, Punjab is among the top three states in India.<sup>8</sup> The agroprocessing industries have not been able to absorb the surplus population thrown out of land by the process of the green revolution. The growth of other industries has remained retarded. The centralized nature of the Indian federation has concentrated the industrial licensing powers in the hands of the central government which has remained a constant source of tension with the state government dominated by the capitalist farmers. Unlike other states where public sector industrialization has played a major role, the private sector has dominated the industrial sector of the Punjab. In 1980, only 5.2 per cent of the workers were employed in public

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<sup>6</sup> Harish K. Puri (1985). Punjab: Elections and After. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (40): 1682.

<sup>7</sup> Overall, the share of manufacturing in the total state domestic product (SDP) has witnessed a downward trend during the green revolution years. In 1967-68, the share of manufacturing in SDP was 29.26 per cent which came down to 20.47 per cent in 1985-86. See, U.D.R. Choudhury (1992). Inter-State and Intra-State Variations in Economic Development and Standard of Living. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 (49 & 50): 2653.

<sup>8</sup> Gurmail Singh and H.S. Shergill (1997). Agro-Processing Developments in Punjab: Year 2001. Chandigarh: Institute of Development and Communication, Online Edition (<http://www.simplex-ost.com>).

sector units in the Punjab compared with 24.4 per cent for all-India.<sup>9</sup> The capitalist transformation in agriculture in the Punjab took place at a time when predatory capitalism was making its presence felt at national, regional and international political economy. It was the license permit *raj* of Indira Gandhi that gave rise to a protected sector of the luxury goods producing sector which produced windfall profits. The state-controlled inflow of foreign capital in certain sectors of the luxury goods production created a class of instant billionaires.<sup>10</sup> The spin-off effect of the industrial activity, which promised windfall profits, was the flourishing of the underworld economy. In Punjab, it was across-border arms and drug smuggling that strengthened the forces of this casino capital. Their activities brought quick and heavy profits, whereas investments in industrial ventures would require patience and generate only average returns.

The first attempts to study the capitalist transformation in agriculture as a result of the green revolution began in the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly* in the second half of the 1960s. The "modes of production" debate triggered a lively debate on the impact of the green revolution on the political economy of India. On the question of capitalist transformation, three different tendencies emerged: The first tendency denied the intrusion of capitalist relations in the country altogether; the second tendency conceded that capitalist relations have developed to certain extent, mainly since independence; and the third tendency of the Frankian dependency school considered the country's historical integration into the world capitalist economy as a sufficient proof of capitalist relations in the country.<sup>11</sup> Those who continued to deny the transition to

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<sup>9</sup> Nirmal S. Azad (1987). Distorted Economic Development: Affluence and Backwardness in Punjab. in *Punjab Today*. Edited by Gopal Singh, New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> For the political economy of the predatory capitalism, see Chapter 6.

<sup>11</sup> Jairus Banaji (1978). Capitalist Domination and the Small Peasantry: Deccan Districts in the Late 19th Century. *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India*, Essay Collection, Lahore: Vanguard Books, p. 408.

capitalism in the agriculture failed to analyze the changes that occurred in the post-independence period. As a result, according to Omvedt, the debate "centered itself on the colonial period and failed to analyze the qualitatively different processes at work in the post-colonial phase."<sup>12</sup> The second and third tendencies could not differentiate the qualitatively different processes of the so-called primitive accumulation under the colonial regime and the bourgeois republic. The primitive accumulation under colonial capital divorced the peasant from the land and concentrated the land in the hands of the moneylenders and the feudal landlords. The landless peasants became 'peasants-at-well' when landlords returned the same land to the cultivators in return for a rent to be paid in the form of a part of the produce, often one-half. In the post-colonial period, the partition and subsequent land reform legislations introduced by the bourgeois state eliminated the feudal estates. The process of primitive accumulation that divorced the small and marginal peasants from the land turned them into free wage laborers as the land was concentrated in the hands of the 'self-cultivating' class of the rich capitalist farmers.

The second debate on the political economy of the green revolution began in the early 1980s as a result of the onset of the 'Punjab crisis.' The basic premise of this new "socio-economic" analysis was that capitalism in the Punjab agriculture was an accomplished fact. The participants tried to understand the contradictions of this capitalistic transformation in order to study the context of the political crisis brought about by the religious extremists. The 'socio-economic' school focused primarily on the deepening antithesis between the town and the country. Gill and Singhal pointed out that since Sikh farmers have to sell their product through urban Hindu traders and buy agricultural inputs from Indian monopolies, this brings the entire Sikh peasantry into a direct contradiction with traders and industrial monopolies.<sup>13</sup> D'Souza and Singh focused

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<sup>12</sup> Gail Omvedt (1981). Capitalist Agriculture and Rural Classes in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 (52): A-140.

<sup>13</sup> Sucha Singh Gill and K.C. Singhal (1985). Genesis of Punjab Problem. in Abida

on the interests of the dominant castes in the Sikh and Hindu communities. Thus, according to D'Souza, the leading positions in both communities are occupied by the *Jatt* Sikh farmers and Hindu *Khatris* traders, who have tried to safeguard their economic interests by invoking religion.<sup>14</sup> Singh, on the other hand, contends that it is not the *Jatt* Sikh farmers who have used religion to consolidate their dominant position vis-à-vis the Hindu traders but the urban Sikh *Khatris* traders who are irked by the Hindu *Khatris* traders surpassing them in the appropriation of money from the Sikh agriculturists.<sup>15</sup> The focus of the new 'socio-economic' analysis remained the beneficiaries of the green revolution: capitalist rural farmers and the urban petty bourgeoisie who came to control the markets. It failed to grasp the essence of the primitive accumulation which divorced the producer from the means of production. Thus, the contradiction between capitalist farmers and the landless laborers did not attract the attention of the 'socio-economic' school. Secondly, efforts to bring out the primacy of the contradiction between capitalist farmers and urban petty bourgeoisie masked the major contradiction between the agricultural capital and industrial capital. The inter-sectoral contradiction was between industry and agriculture which revealed itself in the domain of the center-state tussles between Delhi and Punjab. In the countryside, the contradiction between the landless and marginal peasantry and capitalist farmers remained the primary contradiction. The Congress party's attempts to use certain religious sects in the Punjab to weaken the Akali Dal, the party of capitalist farmers of the Punjab, must be analyzed in the context of these two contradictions. The success of the green revolution in the Punjab on the one hand sharpened the contradiction between industry and agriculture, and on the other it

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Samiuddin, editor. *The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, pp. 37-51.

<sup>14</sup> Victor D'Souza (1985). Economy, Caste, Religion and Population Distribution: An Analysis of Communal Tension in Punjab. in Abida Samiuddin, op. cit., pp. 52-74.

<sup>15</sup> Gopal Singh (1985). Socio-Economic Bases of the Punjab Crisis. in Abida Samiuddin, op. cit., p. 85.

created an antagonistic division within the countryside between capitalist farmers and marginal and landless peasants. All these developments took place at a time when the forces of predatory capitalism were spreading their web in the national and international political economy. The study of the green revolution in isolation from its national and international environment, and the sole focus on the beneficiaries of the capitalist development in agriculture could not give any great insights into these contradictory processes of the so-called green revolution.

### **The Green Revolution**

After his visit to the Punjab in 1975, S.H. Whitewater, director of agriculture at Michigan State University, commented that "the greatest progress of all time in agricultural development has not been in the USA; it has been in Punjab....Punjab probably made more agricultural progress in the last ten years than any other region on the face of the earth at all time."<sup>16</sup> The progress in the agricultural production has indeed been remarkable. Whereas the food grains production of the state in 1950-51 was only two million tones, it increased to more than 20 million tones in 1990-91.<sup>17</sup> Immediately after independence, the Punjab had a deficit in foodgrains of 35,000 tones.<sup>18</sup> The state occupies about 1.5 per cent of the geographical area of India, but now it contributes 60 to 70 per cent of wheat and 50 to 55 per cent of rice to the Central Pool of the country.<sup>19</sup> The Punjab has some five million hectares of land area of which about 4.2 million hectares is cropped. Thus, about 84 per cent of the geographical area of the Punjab is

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Pritam Singh (1995). *Punjab Economy: The Emerging Pattern*. New Delhi: Enkay Publishers, p. i.

<sup>17</sup> Ranjit Singh (1991). The Green Revolution: An Analysis. in B.S. Hansra and A.N. Shukla, eds. *Social, Economic and Political Implications of Green Revolution*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> I.J. Singh (1997). Agricultural Situation in India and Pakistan. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (26): A-90.

<sup>19</sup> Ranjit Singh (1991). op. cit., p. 12.



under crops.<sup>20</sup> In 1986, the share of foodgrains of Punjab and Haryana, the two states that benefited the most from the green revolution technologies, of the total all-India production was 11 per cent and 5 per cent respectively.<sup>21</sup>

The comparative 'success' in the green revolution in the Punjab is due to a number of favorable conditions prevailing in the state. Writing in 1972, Byres noted that "Punjab is an unusual state in several respects. It has always been a high growth area; it has the smallest proportion of farm workers who are landless of all the Indian states; its farms are on average twice as large as the all India size; consolidation has proceeded far more than elsewhere; irrigation is more widespread, and so on."<sup>22</sup> With the exception of the princely states, the Punjab agriculture was dominated by self-cultivators. Some relatively large landholdings were reduced as a result of the partition in 1947. In the pre-independence Punjab, feudal elements were strong in two areas, the western Punjab- what is now Pakistan- and the Sikh princely states. The rest of the Punjab peasantry belonged to the self-cultivator category. It was a highly differentiated peasantry which included some marginal subsistence level peasants and some rich peasants with relatively large landholdings who sold major part of their crops in the markets. The partition of Punjab in 1947 greatly reduced the holdings of the feudal landlords and the rich peasants. In order to settle the Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan, a system of graded cuts was applied to every landlord.<sup>23</sup> While almost equal number of refugees crossed the border in

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<sup>20</sup> S.S. Johal (1988). *Future of Agriculture in Punjab*. Chandigarh: Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> In 1991, the population of Punjab and Haryana was 20 million and 16 million respectively. See, Jyotirindra Dasgupta (1994). *Developmental Federalism: India's Evolving Institutional Enterprise*. in *The Indira-Rajiv Years: The Indian Economy and Polity 1966-1991*. Edited by Nanda K. Choudhary and Salim Mansur, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> T.J. Byres (1972). The Dialectic of India's Green Revolution. *South Asian Review*, 5 (2): 107-108.

<sup>23</sup> Up to 10 acres were subjected to a 25 percent cut, between 10 and 30 acres were subjected to a 30 percent cut, and between 100 and 150 acres were subjected to a 75

opposite directions- 4.3 million came to India and 4.2 million went to Pakistan- Hindu and Sikh refugees had to abandon 2.7 million hectares of land, of which 1.7 million hectares were irrigated, while the Muslim peasantry left less than 1.9 million hectares, of which 0.53 million hectares were irrigated.<sup>24</sup> The Punjab was able to settle the refugees relatively quickly and, as a result of the refugee settlement, a large element of land reforms was introduced which reduced the size of landholdings and created a large number of self-cultivators. In sharp contrast, the refugees from East Bengal could never be settled, except in places like Andamans. When a large scale settlement scheme was attempted in Dandakaranya, it threatened the displacement of the tribals.<sup>25</sup>

By the time the first agrarian reform legislation- the Punjab Land Ceiling Act (1955)- was passed, the land distribution in the state had leveled off considerably. Similar legislations had been passed in all parts of India with an objective to "abolish the *zamindari* system."<sup>26</sup> A study concluded that as a result of these agrarian legislations 20 million statutory tenants acquired occupancy rights.<sup>27</sup> The impact of the anti-*zamindari* measures was uneven. In areas where feudal landed interests were strong, as was the case in Bihar and eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh, the land reform measures remained largely ineffective. In Punjab, however, the feudal gentry suffered a serious blow. The post-partition events shook the countryside so badly that, unlike in most other Indian states,

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percent cuts. See Gaynesh Kudaisya (1995). The Demographic Upheaval of Partition: Refugees and Agricultural Resettlement in India, 1947-67. *South Asia*, 18 (Special Issue): 81.

<sup>24</sup> The Pakistani Punjab inherited 55 percent of the population, 62 percent of the geographical area, 70 percent of the canal irrigation built by the British, and 70 percent of the income of the old Punjab. See I.J. Singh (1997). Agriculture Situation in India and Pakistan, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (26): A-90.

<sup>25</sup> Gyanesh Kudaisya (1995). *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> H.R. Sharma (1994). Distribution of Landholdings in Rural India, 1953-54 to 1981-82: Implications for Land Reform, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 (13): A-12.

<sup>27</sup> V.M. Rao (1996). Agricultural Development with a Human Face: Experiences and Prospects, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (26): A-54.

the rural propertied interests in the Punjab could not muster enough political strength to take the executive of the state from the urban petty-bourgeoisie until 1956. The agrarian reform program of the bourgeois republic that set the process of capitalistic transformation in motion favored the rich strata of the agrarian classes. As the feudal gentry lost most of its economic strength during partition of 1947, it was relatively easy for the state to strike a complete blow against the vestiges of feudalism, such as the tenancy.

By the middle of the 1950s, when the first agrarian legislation was passed in the state, the rural middle and the rich propertied classes had become economically and politically more stronger. Thus, the legislation was drawn largely to serve the interests of these richer sections (the Kulaks) of the agricultural classes. The Punjab Land Ceiling Act (1955) had four main components: (i) abolition of intermediaries<sup>28</sup>, (ii) protection of tenants, (iii) consolidation of holdings, and (iv) redistribution of land through imposition of ceilings.<sup>29</sup> As most of the intermediaries belonged to the non-agricultural classes, mainly the money lenders, the Kulaks acted quickly to destroy their base. Thus, the task of abolishing intermediaries was completed relatively quickly. The law was also successful in protecting the tenants and ultimately eliminating tenancy by giving ownership rights to the tenants. The overall interests of the Kulaks prevailed against certain landed interests who were providing fuel to the Communist party's revolutionary struggle. The struggle of the tenants was led the Communist Party (CP) of India in the former princely states of PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union). Ever since, the CP has maintained a relatively strong base among the rural poor in these districts of the *Malwa* region. The new legislation accepted a compromised position. It fixed the

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<sup>28</sup> Those who rented land from the landlords and passed it on to the peasants. Like merchants, their profits came from the difference between what they received from the peasants, and what they paid to the landlords.

<sup>29</sup> G.K. Chadha (1986). op. cit., p. 219.

maximum rent at one-third, from the previous one-half, of the gross produce. The security of the tenure was conferred upon the tenant in respect of land which was not within the landowners permissible limit of 30 standard acres.<sup>30</sup> Further, the tenants had the option to purchase the land. The landlords, however, started re-possessing large portions of the land from the tenants as the Land Ceiling Act allowed certain exemptions for self-cultivators. Thus, in order to avoid the land ceiling limits, many landlords became self-cultivators overnight. The net result has been a sharp decline in the tenancy in the Punjab. In 1947, the owner cultivation stood at 51.4 per cent, while tenant cultivation was 48.6 per cent of the total cultivated land, the figures for 1975 were 80.7 per cent and 19.3 per cent respectively.<sup>31</sup>

In order to concentrate their lands in one piece which was most fertile and easy to irrigate, the Kulaks all over India pursued the agenda of consolidations vigorously. It was only in the Punjab and Haryana, however, that the Kulaks were able to achieve their goal one hundred percent. By 1969, both the Punjab and Haryana had already achieved one hundred percent target in the consolidation of holdings while, in the same year, Bihar had brought only 6.77 percent of the total cultivated area under consolidation.<sup>32</sup> A study concluded that in the process of consolidation of holdings, tenants and small farmers were generally losers while influential and large farmers received a better deal.<sup>33</sup> The small and marginal farmers ended-up receiving inferior quality land, while the process helped the medium and large farmers to acquire more fertile land and adopt new technologies more easily. The disadvantages of fragmented and scattered holdings were many. Apart from many other problems, private irrigation was practically impossible on

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Gaynesh Kudaisya (1995). *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>33</sup> V.M. Rao (1992). *Land Reform Experience: Perspectives for Strategy and Programs. Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 (26): A-56.

scattered plots. Thus, the act of consolidation has brought in considerable increase in agricultural production, particularly through investments in private irrigation.<sup>34</sup>

In the area of land ceilings, the act had almost no impact. The 1955 act had set a standard limit of 30 acres<sup>35</sup>. At the same time, it allowed thirteen exemptions to avoid the land ceilings. While the level of ceiling was relatively high, "the classification of land gave scope for manipulation, the exemptions from ceiling were too many and the unit of application was defined loosely."<sup>36</sup> The act was amended in 1972 to lower the ceiling to 17.5 standard acres. It allowed no exemptions and the ceilings now applied to the family instead of individual members. A study conducted by the Punjab *Khet Mazdoor Sabha* (Farm Workers Union of Punjab) in 1977 revealed that only "1,293 hectares of farmland has been distributed among 1,093 eligible persons."<sup>37</sup> Needless to say, the land ceiling act has failed miserably in Punjab. The land reform act contributed enormously to the capitalist transformation in agriculture. The early completion of consolidations was the first positive step in that direction. Now it was easier and far more convenient for the farmers to sink tubewells and pumping sets for irrigation. As tractors are more feasible on relatively larger plots, the consolidation of scattered pieces of land in one area for each farmer paved the way for tractorization. By giving ownership titles to tenants on payment, a potential for mechanization was created as the new farmers were now able to secure loans on their newly acquired land assets. The act also brought many idle landlords into direct production as self-cultivation saved them from the ceiling limits.

A study published in 1986 concluded that among all categories of farmers, the drive toward capitalist farming was spearheaded by the middle-range farmers (those

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<sup>34</sup> V.M. Rao (1992). Land Reform Experience: Perspectives for Strategy and Programs. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 (26): p. A-56.

<sup>35</sup> Individuals were taken as units.

<sup>36</sup> V.M. Rao (1992), op. cit., p. A-56.

<sup>37</sup> Harish K. Puri (1983). Green Revolution and Its Impact on Punjab Politics. *The Indian Political Science Review*, 17 (1): 102.

owning between 5 and 20 acres).<sup>38</sup> The process of differentiation also affected this category as many of the middle farmers joined the ranks of the small, marginal and landless farmers while a few joined the ranks of the rich farmers. In 1953-54, holdings between 5 and 20 acres constituted 41.72 of the total holdings and shared 45.72 per cent of area operated. In 1971-72, these percentages were 56.82 and 59.09 respectively.<sup>39</sup> Since then, this middle category has been shrinking at a much faster rate. In 1990-91, only 20 per cent of the landholdings belonged to the middle category of 5 to 20 acres.<sup>40</sup> Initially the middle-range farm size (especially the upper crust of this category) provided best conditions for modern irrigation and mechanized farming. Apart from irrigating their own plots with tubewells and pump sets, these farmers rented water facilities to smaller and marginal farmers. Similarly, the use of tractors and other farm machinery, i.e., threshers, brought cash rent. The Kulaks control over the state executive also gave them easy access to co-op credit schemes and various other state subsidies, including fertilizers and electricity. The machinery bought on credit fetched enough cash from renting that, in most cases, it was possible to meet payments just from that source alone.

Even before the introduction of the High Yield Variety (HYV) in the second half of the 1960s, the region of Punjab and Haryana had a relatively strong growth in agriculture. In the period between 1952-53 and 1964-65, the production of wheat rose at an annual rate of 6.19 percent compared with the all India rate of 3.75 percent.<sup>41</sup> Given the enormity of the task after the bloody partition, it was considerable. Most of the infrastructure, including digging of new canals, was completed in the early 1960s. Both in the short-term and the long-term plans, the major share of public investment was

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<sup>38</sup> G.K. Chadha (1986). op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Advisor to Government of Punjab, pp. 188-189.

<sup>41</sup> Rahul and Jacob Nellithanam (1997). Green Revolution and Subsistence Agriculture: You Reap as You Sow. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (18): 930.

allocated to the development of basic infrastructure for agriculture. All these internal achievements came at a time when international capital, particularly the US capital, began promoting the 'green revolution' technologies to boost grain production. The aim was two-fold: (i) to prevent the spread of 'red' revolution and make the world safer for capitalist accumulation, and (ii) to help the agro-business multinationals gain a foothold in the developing world. During discussions in the United States' House of Representatives, the green revolution was presented as a major tool of the United States foreign policy.<sup>42</sup> The efforts to spread green revolution had begun as early as in 1943 when Rockefeller Foundation sent a team of agricultural experts led by Dr. Borlaug to Mexico to set up a research program.<sup>43</sup> The research program sounded a positive note in the 1950s when Mexico witnessed a dramatic jump in total wheat production. After Mexico, attention was diverted to the far east, the Philippines in particular, where the revolutionary movement was spreading quickly. In 1960, the Ford Foundation, with the approval of the Indian government, initiated the Intensive Agricultural Districts Program.<sup>44</sup> The program focused on the richest farmers in selected districts with rich irrigation facilities. Rockefeller Foundation also sent agricultural experts in 1961 to study millet in India. The shift to High Yield Variety (HYV) seeds in 1966-67 came after serious droughts of 1965-67 and the "arm-twisting" by President Johnson who announced stringent new conditions for food aid. Food deliveries "would depend on the willingness of receiving countries to shift emphasis from industrialization to agricultural development, to expand or institute population control programs, and to open their doors

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<sup>42</sup> Pierre Spitz (1987). The Green Revolution Re-Examined in India. in Bernhard Glaeser, ed. *The Green Revolution Revisited: Critique and Alternatives*. London: Allen and Unwin, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Harry M. Cleaver (1972). The Contradictions of the Green Revolution. *Monthly Review*, 24 (2): 81.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

to interested US investors."<sup>45</sup> The goals of this HYV based agricultural technology were to "increase social stability, spread capitalist markets into rural areas, and create new sales and investment opportunities for multinational agrobusiness."<sup>46</sup>

India's willingness to go along with the HYV technologies was in response to the famines of the 1960s which made the country dependent upon foreign food aid. The food aid from the United States came with strings attached. A considerable pressure was exerted on the Indian state to abandon its leading role in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). The only way to resist such American strong arm tactics was to achieve self-sufficiency in foodgrains. Thus, in order to maintain its independence, the Indian state accepted the program of HYV green revolution technologies to boost food production. In turn, it had to adopt certain liberalization measures which opened the doors for further penetration of foreign capital. Within India, only a few areas which had plenty of irrigation facilities and fertile lands in the North-West, including the Punjab and Haryana, were carefully selected for the adoption of the HYV technologies. In the period between 1967-68 and 1978-79, the HYV wheat area in Punjab increased from 35 per cent of the total cultivated area to 96.20 per cent. In the same period, the HYV rice area increased from 5.41 per cent to 95.06 per cent.<sup>47</sup> The consumption of fertilizers in the same period increased from 8.84 kgs per acre to 90.96 kgs per acre.<sup>48</sup> As a result, Punjab has led the nation in the rise of food production. In the first decade of the green revolution, from 1967 to 1977, the Punjab witnessed a 5.29 per cent annual increase in the foodgrains, compared with 2.86 for Haryana and 2.31 for all-India. From 1978 to 1988, the Punjab recorded a 4.57 per cent increase in the production of the foodgrains, compared with 3.9 per cent for Haryana and 2.68 per cent for all-India.<sup>49</sup> The growth in

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>47</sup> G.S. Bhalla and G.K. Chadha (1983). *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>49</sup> C.H. Hanumantha Rao (1989). *Technological Change in Indian Agriculture: Emerging*



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rice production from 1967 to 1977 was 18.21<sup>50</sup> per cent per annum in the Punjab, compared with 11.34 per cent for Haryana and 2.16 per cent for all-India. Between 1978 and 1988, rice production grew at an annual rate of 7.04 per cent, compared with 5.12 per cent for Haryana and 3.19 per cent for all-India.<sup>51</sup>

An indication of capitalistic farming was the increased re-investment in agriculture. For example, in 1972 the top 10 per cent of the farmers, owning more than 20 acres of land, bought 68.75 per cent of all tractors sold in the state, 24.72 per cent of the tubewells/pumping sets, 28.40 per cent of threshers and 15.4 per cent of land.<sup>52</sup> Even the bottom 48 per cent, owning less than 5 acres of land, purchased 18 per cent of the tubewells/pumping sets, 20.31 per cent of the threshers and 15.4 per cent of the land.<sup>53</sup> As a result, in 1972 there was one tractor for every 102 acres of net sown area in the Punjab, against 922 acres at the all India level. In the same year, there was one tubewell for every 14 acres of net sown area.<sup>54</sup> The number of tractors in the Punjab have risen from 4935 in 1961 to 118,845 in 1980-81 to 354,378 in 1994-95<sup>55</sup>, which amounted to one tractor for every 12 acres. The tractors, threshers and combines bought by the rich farmers on credit through the state-owned co-operative credit agencies bring them additional income as the farm machinery is leased to small farmers and the lower rung of the middle category of farmers. The low interest loans from the co-operative credit agencies, whose boardrooms are controlled by the rich capitalist farmers, are just one of

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Trends and Perspectives. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 44 (4): 387.

<sup>50</sup> Such a high percentage in the increase in production of rice is mainly due to the expansion of area under rice production. Historically, the region of Punjab did not grow rice. Wheat and corn were the leading two crops. Now rice production has replaced corn, which has almost disappeared in the past two decades.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Harish K. Puri (1983). *op. cit.*, p.102.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> G.S. Bhalla and G.K. Chadha (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Adviser to the Government of Punjab, pp. 566-567.

several ways the state contributes public money for the private capitalist enterprises of the Kulaks.

In every plan, the Punjab government has devoted roughly 70 per cent of the total plan outlay to irrigation and power, and agriculture and community development. The results are clear from the enormous expansion of irrigation and power facilities. In 1950-51, about 52 per cent of the gross cropped area was irrigated (compared with 17.11 per cent at national level). In 1983-84, over 90 per cent of the area was irrigated (compared with 28.61 per cent at the national level).<sup>56</sup> The trend has clearly been in favor of tubewells. The number of tubewells has gone from zero in 1950 to 26,066 in 1965-66 to 269,430 in 1979-80<sup>57</sup>. In February 1997, there are 860,000 tubewells of which 684,000 run on electricity and 174,000 run on diesel while 200,000 applications are pending for connections.<sup>58</sup> There is a tubewell for every five acres. The growth in tubewells came as a result of the expansion of power base in Punjab. The per capita power consumption, for quite some time, was lower than the rest of the country. However, in less than three decades after the independence, Punjab became the first state to fully electrify every village of the state on May 10, 1976 (compared with 37.7 per cent at national level).<sup>59</sup> The generation of electricity increased from 1,819 million KWH in 1965-66 to 5,930 KWH in 1978-79.<sup>60</sup> There is a strong rural bias in the consumption of electricity. In 1982-83, agriculture alone accounted for about 41.0 per cent of the power consumption in the Punjab.<sup>61</sup>

The agricultural development of the state has made Punjab the "richest" province of India in "per capita terms." However, this prosperity has not been shared by all the

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<sup>56</sup> G.K. Chadha (1986). op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>57</sup> Harish K. Puri (1983). op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>58</sup> *The Times of India* (Online Edition), February 17, 1997.

<sup>59</sup> Harish K. Puri (1983). op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> G.K. Chadha (1986). op. cit., p. 75.

sections of the Punjabi society. The process of agricultural growth in the Punjab has recorded one of the fastest rates of peasant differentiation in India. The ratio of landless workers in the total agricultural workforce rose from 17.3 per cent in 1961 to 32.1 per cent in 1971 and more than 40 per cent in 1980.<sup>62</sup> The small and marginal farmers continued to join the ranks of the landless. Between 1953-54 and 1971-72, those operating 2.5 acres or less declined from 32.22 per cent to 14.41 per cent to 11.71 per cent in the early 1980s.<sup>63</sup> In 1971, the middle category accounted for more than half of the farmers; now it accounts for one-fifth of the total. On the other hand, more than 75 per cent of all agricultural wealth, including land and movable assets, is in the hands of the 10 per cent of the rural households, while the poorest 70 per cent of the households possess less than 7 per cent of all assets.<sup>64</sup> In 1980, in this land of plenty 38 per cent of the rural households and 11 per cent of the urban households lived below the poverty line. The state with the highest per capita income ranked eleventh amongst the states when percentage of population below the poverty line was taken into consideration.<sup>65</sup> With almost forty per cent of the rural households living under the poverty line, the gains of the green revolution are certainly not equal.

Capitalist development in agriculture has witnessed the virtual elimination of the small (those who own less than 2.5 acres) and marginal farmers. A study of the Punjab economy has rightly concluded that the small farmer was a 'step son' of the green revolution.<sup>66</sup> While the green revolution technologies helped the rich in more than one way, they had an inherent bias against the small and marginal peasants. For example, the

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<sup>62</sup> Gopal Singh (1984). Socio-Economic Basis of the Punjab Crisis. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (1): 42.

<sup>63</sup> G.K. Chadha (1986). op. cit., p. 345.

<sup>64</sup> Harish Puri (1985). Punjab: Elections and After. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (40): 1682.

<sup>65</sup> Pritam Singh (1995). *Punjab Economy: The Emerging Pattern*. New Delhi: Enkay Publishers, p. 435.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Kulaks control over the state power made it easier for them to obtain loans from the government co-op credit agencies. Not only did they pocket most of the loans, but the rich farmers were also involved in credit scams. In 1975, it was reported that Rs.190 million was embezzled by the rich farmers and the state bureaucrats.<sup>67</sup> The Kulaks controlled state legislatures have also resorted to such populist measures as waiving of the farm loans to "give relief" to the agricultural sector. As the small and marginal farmers are denied loans, they turn to the village money-lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates. A study noted that with "the increase in the size of the holding the dependence on money lenders decreased. Big farmers were least dependent on the non-institutional source."<sup>68</sup> Since the government credit agencies only loan money on the basis of land, the small and the marginal farmers are unable to secure needed loans. In case they manage to get some meager amount, the agencies insist that another loan on the same land can not be obtained unless the first one is fully paid. Thus, the small farmers are left with no option but to turn to the informal sources, where owned land is not insisted upon as a collateral. Since crop is taken as collateral, the farmer who is ready to sell his crop to the lender and pay three times more interest than the government credit agency gets a loan.<sup>69</sup> While the rich farmers have pocketed all the fruits of the green revolution, the small and the marginal farmers of the same state, and of the same caste and religion, "are unable to earn enough to meet their consumption needs."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, as they lose their small holdings, they have been unable to find employment in other sectors due to a lack of an industrial base which could absorb the latent surplus population from the agricultural sector. The small-scale agro-processing industrial units

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<sup>67</sup> Harish K. Puri (1983). op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>68</sup> Pritam Singh (1995). op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>69</sup> Anita Gill (1996). Interlinked Agrarian Credit Markets in Punjab: Exploitative, Yet Growing. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (10): 587.

<sup>70</sup> Pritam Singh (1995). op. cit., p. 175.

have not been able to absorb the army of the unemployed and the underemployed workers.

### **Lack of an Industrial Revolution**

The transition of capital from agriculture to industry in the Punjab has mainly been in the form of agro-processing. The agro-processing industries constitute 40 percent of all industrial enterprises in the state.<sup>71</sup> In terms of its share in all-India market and production, the Punjab agro-processing sector is among the top three states of India. But unlike these other two states, Maharashtra and Gujrat, most of the agro-processing industries in the Punjab, with the exception of sugar co-op mills, are in private hands. The capitalists of the state who have invested in agro-processing take full advantage of various state subsidies for this sector. As the political economy of the 1970s witnessed a steady rise in predatory capitalism where capital sought windfall profits, the investment in traditional heavy industries, like steel and tool making, remained marginal because of low returns. The speculative sectors, like urban real estate and various service industries including hotels, bars, etc., attracted more capital as the scope of windfall profits was much larger. In addition, border smuggling of weapons and drugs created a huge underground economy which fueled the urban real estate economies and the service sectors. The center's exclusive control over licensing for heavy industries also played a role in the lack of heavy industries which could generate employment opportunities for the surplus population of the state.

As a result, the industrial sector of the state has remained rather weak. In 1970, there were 121 industrial units in the Punjab which employed more than 100 workers. A decade later, the number of units employing more than 100 workers was only 151. In

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<sup>71</sup> Gurmail Singh and H.S. Shergill (1997). op. cit..

1994, their numbers actually declined to 142 units.<sup>72</sup> Most small industrial units are run by the family labor of village and town artisans. Only the growth of medium scale agro-processing industries has been somewhat satisfactory. Between 1960-61 and 1977-78, the overall growth of the secondary sector was 6.87 per cent per annum. In the same period, however, its total share in the state's income rose from 15.63 per cent to only 20.55 per cent.<sup>73</sup> More than a decade and half later, in 1994-95, the share of the secondary sector stood at 21.84 per cent of the state's income.<sup>74</sup> While the primary sector has continued to provide nearly half of the state's income, the tertiary sector of the economy has contributed between 30 and 32 per cent of the state's income for the past three decades.<sup>75</sup>

The lack of industrial progress has invited charges of discrimination by the central government. It has been alleged that "like colonialists, the Indian ruling classes have kept Punjab out of reach for heavy industry."<sup>76</sup> It is argued that while other states have forged ahead in industrial progress, the Punjab has remained stagnant. In 1965-66, the Punjab ranked eighth in India with 4.1 per cent of the share of industrial production, but in 1977-78 it came down to tenth position with only 2.8 per cent share of industrial production.<sup>77</sup> In the sixth five-year plan (1980-85), the central government allotted Rs. 240 billion to investment in heavy industry, but only Rs. 100 million (0.04) was to be spent in the Punjab.<sup>78</sup> Thus, in the absence of heavy industry, the state's savings are also

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<sup>72</sup> Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Advisor to Government of Punjab, pp. 388-89.

<sup>73</sup> G.S. Bhalla and G.K. Chadha (1983). *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Devinder Pal Sandhu (1992). *Sikhs in Indian Politics: Study of a Minority*. New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, p. 126.

<sup>77</sup> G.S. Dhillon (1992). *India Commits Suicide*. Chandigarh: Singh and Singh Publishers, p. 72.

<sup>78</sup> Robin Jeffrey (1994). *op. cit.*, p. 34.

not being used for its industrial development. On average, of the Rs. 3.6 billion deposited per annum in the banks, Rs. 2.5 billion are used outside the state.<sup>79</sup>

Capitalist development in the mixed economy of India, where state capitalism has played a vital role, has produced uneven development. Capital has remained concentrated in various parts due to their proximity to raw materials, abundance of cheap labor, and easy access to markets. The location of state industries has also been guided by the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. The process of industrialization, particularly in term of the heavy industries, only deals with one aspect of the economy. Thus, the money allocated to the Punjab in the development funds for heavy industry appears meager and indeed discriminatory. In its objective to achieve food security, the Indian bourgeois state has by contrast allocated disproportionately more money to the state of Punjab. Thus, in its overall development plan the state of Punjab was developed as a bread basket of the nation as many prevailing factors favored the development of agriculture in the state. Based on per capita plan outlay, the Punjab received Rs. 90 against the all states' average of Rs. 61 in the fourth plan (1969-74).<sup>80</sup> In the fifth plan (1974-79), the Punjab's per capita share came to Rs. 531 against Rs. 481 for Haryana, Rs. 372 for Maharashtra, Rs. 200 for West Bengal, Rs. 155 for Bihar, and Rs. 262 for all states.<sup>81</sup> In the sixth plan (1980-85), Punjab obtained Rs. 1444 compared with all states' average of Rs. 872. In the seventh plan (1986-91), the Punjab's share was Rs. 1685 against the all states' average of Rs. 1026, while Bihar and West Bengal received only Rs. 626 and Rs. 653 respectively.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> A.S. Narang (1986). *Punjab Politics in National Perspective: A Study in Democracy, Development and Distortion*. New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing, p. 180.

<sup>80</sup> Government of India (1984). *The Sikhs in their Homeland India*. New Delhi: Government of India, p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Jyotindra Dasgupta (1994). Developmental Federalism: India's Evolving Institutional Enterprise. in *The Indira-Rajiv Years: The Indian Economy and Polity 1966-1991*. Edited by Nanda K. Choudhary and Salim Mansur, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 82.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

It is not the lack of fair share of central funds, but the uneven nature of capitalist development that has left the Punjab out of reach of major industrial projects. The same is true in the sphere of state capitalism. The Indian state sought to establish a well-diversified, self-sufficient economy on the national scale. Such a focus ignored the diversification of every state because the bourgeoisie has treated the entire Indian territory as a single market. In an economy of highly-uneven capitalist development, certain regions have remained the suppliers of the raw materials and labor. Despite its enormous mineral wealth, for example, the state of Bihar has remained a supplier of primary materials and labor. The regions of Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh were selected for the green revolution technologies because of their potential to provide food security for India. As a result, the Punjab received less than the national average for its industrial development, but it received more than the national average for its agricultural development.

The displacement of population as a result of capitalistic development in agriculture has in fact created the necessity to enlarge the industrial base to absorb this enormous pool of the surplus labor. The army, a traditional source of employment for Sikh youth, gradually began closing its doors to them after independence. A policy of "proportionate representation in the army to all states" was pursued to correct the "existing imbalances."<sup>83</sup> The agriculture sector has remained the main source of employment for the vast majority of the Punjabis. In 1981, it employed 59.1 percent of the total work force in the state.<sup>84</sup> In addition, the seasonal employment opportunities

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<sup>83</sup> *India Today*, December 15, 1992. If the policy was implemented, the Sikh representation, which stood at 25 percent during World War II, would have dwindled to 2 percent. By 1981, however, the Punjab was still sending four times its population percentage to the army. See Stephen P. Cohen (1990). *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 211.

<sup>84</sup> Sucha Singh Gill and K.C. Singhal (1984). The Punjab Problem: Its Historic Roots. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (14): 518.



have attracted a large number of migrant Bihari labor. The Bihari workers come from two different areas of Bihar: From the northern districts come seasonal workers and from the tribal belt of Chhotanagar come permanent workers. Those who come for seasonal work are not the poorest of the poor but are a little above the lowest rung. These people are able to travel on their own in search of seasonal employment. The largest numbers of migrant laborers come in April-May and October-November during harvest and seeding seasons. On average, they receive 35 percent less than the minimum wage fixed by the state government.<sup>85</sup> The permanent workers from the tribal belt are brought to Punjab by contractors who pay for their travel and, in return, ask for 6 to 12 months of their wages from the farmers before handing them over to the owners.<sup>86</sup> The presence of Bihari labor has exerted a strong pressure against wage hikes in the Punjab<sup>87</sup>, where real wages have not increased since the mid-1970s.<sup>88</sup> This migrant labor is not confined to the agricultural sector, but it has moved into small and medium scale industries as well as in various other menial jobs in the urban areas of the Punjab. Thus, both the Kulaks and the urban bourgeoisie have expropriated the surplus created not only by Punjabi laborers but also by Bihari labor.

### Conclusion

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<sup>85</sup> Manjit Singh (1997). Bonded Migrant Labor in Punjab Agriculture. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 (11): 518.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 519.

<sup>87</sup> During the paddy harvest season in October 1996, I visited a *Mandi* (market) in Bilga village of Jalandhar district. Almost all the farmers and *Artayas* (traders) spoke highly of the Bihari laborers who were described by many as the backbone of the harvest season. The impressions of the local Punjabi laborers were different. They spoke about the downward impact on their wages as a result of the migrant workers willingness to work for less money and long hours. The Bihari laborers were aware of this hostility from the Punjabi laborers; however, most of their anger was directed against the farmers and *artayas* who were described by many as brutal and greedy.

<sup>88</sup> S. Mahendra Dev (1988). Poverty of Agricultural Labor Households in India: A State Level Analysis. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 43 (1): 22.

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The transition to capitalism in Punjab agriculture has created a greater concentration of land and agricultural assets in the hands of a minority, and conversely has deprived the masses of small and medium peasants of the means of production, the land, thus turning them into free wage laborers. The class to benefit from the increased production and wealth as a result of this development is the capitalist farmers (the Kulaks). The process of differentiation of peasantry has sharpened the contradiction between the Kulaks and the landless peasants in the countryside. Capitalist commodity production has also brought agriculture to market at a qualitatively different level where the farmers not only sell their produce but also purchase manufactured products. The industrial sector, which supplies agriculture with the inputs from fertilizers to tractors, has decisive advantages in the non-equivalent exchange with the agricultural sector. It is in the nature of capitalism that big capital dominates small capital. Industrial capital is locked in a constant battle to dominate agricultural capital. Both sectors of the economy have deployed many strategies and tactics to make political headway in their struggle to safeguard their economic interests. The Kulaks of the Punjab have invoked the religious feelings of the Sikhs to not only overcome the contradiction between capitalist farmers and the landless in the countryside but also in their struggle to resist domination by industrial capital. In order to safeguard their position in the agricultural sector, where the capitalist farmers have made lucrative investments, the Kulaks have presented the contradiction between industry and agriculture as a struggle between Hindus, who dominate industrial capital, and Sikhs, who dominate agricultural capital in the state. Thus, the political economy of post-independence Sikh ethno-nationalism is closely linked with the interests of Sikh capitalist farmers.

## Chapter 5

### Kulaks Politics: Ideology, Organization, Strategy

Sikhism has become an ideological weapon of the Kulaks to build a 'common' bond among Sikhs of all classes and to bring them under their command. It is a vital part of the Kulak strategy to fight commercial and industrial bourgeois interests in order to maintain their hegemony. In this strategy, two organizations, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), a political party, and the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhik* Committee (SGPC), an elected body, often called the Sikh parliament, that controls and manages all Sikh temples of the Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, with the exception of individually owned *Deras* (abode) of various *Sants*, have played a central role in the propagation of Sikhism as an ideology. Studies have shown that the Kulaks completely dominate these two premier institutions of the Sikhs. A study conducted in the 1980s found that the members of the SGPC were mostly "males, majority *Jatt* farmers, average in religious competency, low in education...but generally came from comparatively richer sections of the Sikh community."<sup>1</sup> In 1991, another study on the political leadership of the Punjab found that "the legislative leadership of the Akali Dal is dominated by agriculturists and the legislators belonging to the Congress party come mainly from professions."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the study found that the Akali legislators mainly came from rich or middle *Jatt* Sikh backgrounds. These Kulaks-led institutions have propagated a world view among the Sikhs that they are members of a single community (*panth*) who are facing discrimination at the hands of India's central government, which has been described as Hindu government. In major political manifestations of the Akali Dal, in particular the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolutions (ASR), the interests of the Kulaks are

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<sup>1</sup> Gobinder Singh (1986). *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> A.K. Gupta (1991). *Emerging Pattern of Political Leadership: A Case Study of Punjab*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 80.

described as the interests of the entire Sikh community. Thus, the contradiction between capitalist farmers and urban petty bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and between agriculture and industry, on the other, is camouflaged as enmity between the two communities: the "majority Hindus" and the minority Sikhs. According to this worldview, landless Sikhs and Kulak Sikhs, Sikh workers and capitalists Sikhs alike all become members of the Sikh *panth* whose main objective is to assert their independence vis-à-vis Hindus of India<sup>3</sup>. Any opposition to the political program of the Kulaks from within the "Sikh *panth*" is described as a Hindu conspiracy to weaken the *panthic* forces. Unlike the controversies raised by the Sikh reformers during the colonial period between *Khalsa* and non-*Khalsa* Sikhs, the Kulaks led institutions have propagated a single identity for all the Sikhs regardless of their physical appearance. The earlier urban petty-bourgeois Sikh reformers had propagated the *Khalsa* identity to create distinct non-Hindu Sikh identity, while the Kulaks have advocated an anti-Hindu Sikh identity (to hide contradiction between haves and have-nots, and also to safeguard its interests against the big bourgeoisie). The *Khalsa* versus non-*Khalsa* controversies had only strengthened already existing divisions within the Sikh *panth*. The Kulaks attempted to put an end to all such divisions to create a single Sikh identity under their leadership. The continued existence of various religious centers independent of SGPC, however, are expressions of resistance to the domination of the Kulaks on the part of various social forces, particularly the producing classes, within Sikhism.

The need of agricultural capital to assert its hegemony over a specific territory by invoking existing divisions, especially religious divisions, has been ignored by the traditional political science literature. In his study of the politics of the Punjabi *suba*,

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<sup>3</sup> In their speeches and utterances, the *Akali* leaders often speak of the domination by 85 percent Hindus of India over the two percent of Sikhs. The class, caste, language and other divisions among the "Hindus" of India are ignored, much like the divisions among the Sikhs.

Nayar argued that the Akali demand for the creation of a Punjabi state in post-independent India in the name of the Punjabi language was nothing but a demand for the "formation of a state which would be under the political control of the Sikhs."<sup>4</sup> In fact, the linguistic argument of the Akali Dal was viewed as "camouflage for the eventual creation of a Sikh theocratic state."<sup>5</sup> Just like the Akali Dal, Nayar also spoke about the general interests of the Sikhs. The question as to whose interests the demand of a Punjabi *suba* would serve did not receive the attention it deserves. Just like the landed interests in many other regions of India, the dominant agrarian interests of the Punjab also advocated the creation of a linguistic state. Nayar's position that linguistic argument has been made to camouflage a religious demand has failed to grasp that the religious demand itself is a camouflage to hide the class interests of the Kulaks which led the movement for the Punjabi *suba*. A strong defense of Kulaks attempts to foster anti-Hindu Sikh identity to safeguard their interests has come from Sikh historian Grewal. According to Grewal, the Akali Dal has defended the interests of the Sikh *panth* throughout its existence. If anyone is to be blamed for fostering the survival instinct among Sikhs in the post-independence period, it is the Congress leadership, in general, and Nehru in particular who viewed the Akalis as communalists.<sup>6</sup> How such views of Nehru contributed to the strengthening of the anti-Hindu Sikh identity is indeed puzzling. Nationally the Indian ruling classes found secular democracy to be a highly-desired political process through which inter-class and intra-class differences were resolved. This did not rule out the possibility of the use of caste, language, religion, and regional differences by diverse dominant classes to safeguard and advance their interests. The Sikh agrarian interests have relied on the propagation of a particular religious identity to further their interests in much the same

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<sup>4</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar (1966). *Minority Politics in the Punjab*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

<sup>6</sup> J.S. Grewal (1996). *The Akalis: A Short History*. Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publications, p. 111.

ways as the rural interests of Andhra Pradesh or Maharashtra have used linguistic regional identities. Bomball states that the Akali Dal has deliberately fostered the idea of a separate Sikh identity to assume power<sup>7</sup>, but the question arises as to whose interests does the Akali Dal serve? The Akali Dal does not hide the fact that it is a political arm of the Sikh *panth*. The Sikh panth, however, is not a homogenous entity. Like any other community, it is also divided along class lines. The interests of the landless laborers and the capitalist farmers are not the same. A careful study of the political manifestations of the Akali Dal in the context of the political economy of Punjab and India makes it abundantly clear that it is the agenda of the Kulaks that has shaped the directions of Akali politics; either it was the politics of a special status for the Sikhs or the Punjabi suba, provincial autonomy, or separation.

### **The Politics of Special Status**

The agrarian scene in colonial Punjab had three distinct land systems. In the Sikh princely states, the feudal Sikh aristocracy lived off the wealth created by the majority Sikh peasantry. In the eastern and central parts of the Punjab, including the canal colonies of Lyalpur, Montgomery, and Sargoda, the agrarian scene was dominated by a highly differentiated peasantry of self-cultivators. It was this section of the agrarian landed classes that bore the brunt of colonial exploitation in the form of land revenues. A small section of the rich peasantry was able to enjoy tax-free status as they assumed the powers of village revenue collectors- *Nambardars*- through their "services" to the colonial *raj*. The large feudal estates existed in the western Punjab where a majority of the landlords and peasants were Muslims, and in the south-western Punjab where the landlords belonged to all three religions but majority of the peasants were Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> K.R. Bomball (1986). Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Federal Polity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (20): 888.

<sup>8</sup> In certain pockets of central and eastern Punjab, large feudal estates existed but the

Along with the princely estates, this feudal gentry was the pillar of the colonial rule as it enjoyed the power and privilege of the colonial state which included revenue-free lands.

The Sikhs constituted only 13 percent of the total population of the Punjab, compared with 56 percent Muslims and 30 percent Hindus, but they "owned a very large portion of the land in the province and paid more than one-third of the revenue to the state."<sup>9</sup> The majority of the Sikhs were small peasants who suffered under the tutelage of growing debt. A 1925 study of the agrarian debt found that only 17 percent of the households were debt free. The total debt represented twelve times the land revenue paid by all concerned.<sup>10</sup> The indebted Punjab peasantry rose in several protest movements. A cross-communal movement of the peasantry- *Pagri Sambal Jatta* (uphold peasant dignity)- led by Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai in 1907, turned into a mass upsurge against the British in the Punjab countryside. The colonial government was forced to reduce land tax and water rates. A similar cross-communal movement started by the Punjabi immigrants in the pacific coast of North America during World War I also attracted a large number of followers from all religious communities in the rural Punjab. The message of the *Gadhar Lehar* captured the essence of the *bhagti* movement in its appeals to all sections of the Indian society to unite in opposition to the British. Its official propaganda organ, *Gadhar Di Goonj*, declared that:

No Pandit or Mullah do we need;  
No prayers or litanies we need recite;  
These will only scuttle our boat,  
Draw the sword, it is time to fight.<sup>11</sup>

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major portion of the land was tilled by the self-cultivators.

<sup>9</sup> Kailash Chander Gulati (1974). *The Akalis: Past and Present*. New Delhi: Ashajanak Publications, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Darling (1947). *The Punjab Peasant: In Prosperity and Debt*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Harish K. Puri (1993). *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization, Strategy*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, p. 85.

The movement was crushed with brutal force but the surviving members continued their nationalist activities in other political groupings, including the Communist Party of India. A study on the *Gadhar* movement concluded that most *Gadhris* from Punjab turned to communism.<sup>12</sup> Two former *Gadharites*, Bhai Santokh Singh and Abdul Majid, founded a leftist *Kirti Kisan* Party (Worker Peasant Party) in 1927 which later merged with the Communist Party of India. Apart from the Congress and Communist parties, there were other several small political groups whose membership base was cross-communal. A national revolutionary organization known as the *Hindustani* Republican Association operated in the Punjab under the leadership of Bhagat Singh. It had a close association with other workers' and peasants' organizations as it sought to "establish a socialist republic in India."<sup>13</sup> All these nationalist movements attracted a large number of followers from all religious communities of the Punjab. The indebted peasantry was particularly attracted to these struggles.

When the Sikh temple reform movement was launched to wrest control of Sikh shrines from Hindu *Mahants* by the Sikh reformers, it was the Sikh peasantry which came in large numbers to fill the ranks of the militant wing of this movement, the Akali Dal. The defense of the *Mahants* by the British authorities gave the movement an anti-British character. Subservient to the interests of the Sikh feudal gentry, these managers of the Sikh shrines played a vital role in giving religious sanctions to the British *raj* and its officials<sup>14</sup>. The temple reform movement not only turned against British oppression but also against the heavy land tax burdens<sup>15</sup>. Reporting the activities of the volunteer

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>13</sup> J.S. Grewal and Harish K. Puri (1974), eds. *Letters of Udham Singh*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, p. 35

<sup>14</sup> When the people of the Punjab and India were protesting against the brutalities of *Jallian Walla Bagh* massacre of 1919, the management of the Golden Temple decided to honor General Dyer who had ordered the troops to shoot at the peaceful protesters by giving him a *siropa*.

<sup>15</sup> In the resolutions on the Agrarian Question, the fourth Congress of the Third



Akalis, the Commandant of the Jalandhar Brigade commented that the Sikhs were actually "contemplating the possibility of refusal to pay revenue."<sup>16</sup>

The reform movement came to end with the introduction of the Gurdwara Act of 1925, which gave control of the Sikh shrines to the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik* Committee. The compromise was reached with the mediation of the Central Sikh League, an organization of the feudal Sikh aristocracy. The leadership of the Akali Dal came to rest in the hands of the middle and rich peasantry, and the urban petty bourgeoisie. It maintained its anti-colonial program by advocating complete independence in close alliance with the Congress Party<sup>17</sup>. The Akali Dal shared a common platform with the Central Sikh League on the question of a special status for the Sikhs in the legislature and bureaucracy. In view of a large portion of land revenue paid by the Sikhs, the Central Sikh League and the Akali Dal demanded one third of the seats be reserved for the Sikhs. The demand was never accepted, but the clamor for parity with Hindus and Muslims never seized on the part of these organizations. In sharp contrast to the revolutionary parties of the left, which appealed to the producing classes through their socialistic programs against the feudal and capitalist interests, the parties of the rich

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International noted that:

The struggle to free the land from the feudal dues and restrictions thus assumes the character of a national liberation struggle against imperialism and feudal large land owners. Examples of this were provided by the Moplah rising against the feudal land owners and the English in India in the autumn of 1921, and *the Sikh rising* (emphasis added) in 1922. (Cited in Harish K. Puri, op. cit., p. 247)

<sup>16</sup> Shive Kumar (1979). *Peasantry and the Indian National Movement, 1919-1933*. Meerut: Anu Prakashan, p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> In its election manifesto of 1936, the Akali Dal declared that "the party will fight for the complete independence" of India. The organization of feudal Sikh gentry, the Khalsa National Party- organized by Sir Sunder Singh Majithia and Sir Joginder Singh- (reincarnation of the Central Sikh League), on the other hand, stood for the attainment of *swarajya* through constitutional means. See K.C. Gulati (1974). op. cit., pp. 72 and 240.

landed interests had no political program to attract the masses of the people except by appealing to their religious sentiments. Thus, the fostering of a particular exclusionary non-Hindu Sikh identity served the interests of the economically-dominant sections of the Sikh community. However, it did not stop landed interests from entering into coalitions with landed interests from other communities to defend their common class interests.

It was the Unionist Party, founded in 1923, that attracted the feudal gentry from all religious communities in the Punjab.<sup>18</sup> The dominant group in this coalition was the Muslim gentry. The Sikhs were viewed by the Muslims as a part of the larger Hindu society, thus their demand for one-third seats in the legislature with special status was vigorously opposed by the Muslim gentry while the Hindu gentry remained silent. The Muslim gentry feared that the one-third of the seats demanded by the Sikhs, combined with the already existing thirty percent for the Hindus of the Punjab, would reduce the Muslims to a minority status in a state where the Muslims constituted 56 percent of the population. This fierce opposition by the Muslim gentry seems to have provided grounds for the eventual opposition of Sikh landed interests to the general idea of partition of India and ultimately their decision to join India. The Sikh and Hindu landlords of South-Western Punjab were also hesitant to come under the domination of a Muslim-dominated state as a majority of their peasants were Muslims. In case of any clashes of interests, the Muslim gentry could make use of Islam to cause unrest in those areas. As the boundary lines were finally drawn, however, these areas went to Pakistan. The Sikh and Hindu landlords became losers in the deal. In the post-partitioned Punjab, the large feudal

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<sup>18</sup> Men like Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, who represented the interests of the Muslim gentry, Sir Chhotu Ram and Sir Sunder Singh Majhithia, who represented the interests of Hindu and the Sikh gentry respectively, provided a stable coalition of the rural landed interests even after 1935 when Congress swept into power in most other states of India. See Ian Talbot (1996). *Khizr Tiwana: The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India*. Surrey: Curzon Press.

interests suffered further when government applied a system of graded cuts to their lands in order to settle more than 4 million Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> In the new order, Sikh peasantry was settled in the western districts of the Punjab, where Sikhs became an overwhelming majority in the countryside, while Hindu peasantry occupied the eastern districts, constituting an overwhelming majority in the countryside. All the urban areas of the new Punjab were dominated by Hindus. The Sikh urban petty-bourgeoisie found itself in a new junior position with Hindu petty-bourgeoisie controlling the major share of the Punjab markets<sup>20</sup>.

### **From Sikh Homeland to Regional Autonomy**

In the newly-created Indian federation, the rural landed interests retained areas of vital interest, like control over agriculture, health, education, police and local government. All these jurisdictions were of vital interest to the rural gentry. Both Sikh and Hindu landed interests in the Punjab were also pleased with the central government's plan of linguistic re-organization of states. Once the Punjab was divided along linguistic lines, between Punjabi-speaking districts of the western Punjab and the eastern Hindi-speaking areas of Haryana, the rural landed classes would establish their domination in the respective regions. In the United Punjab, rural interests remained divided along religious and linguistic lines with the Punjabi-speaking Sikhs in the east and the Hindi-speaking Hindus in the east. These differences were used to mask the battle over resources, particularly irrigation. All three river systems flowed through the Sikh-dominated areas of the western Punjab. Sikh landlords vehemently protested the building

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> It was also controlling the government through the Chief Ministership of Gopi Chand Bhargwa and Bhim Sen Sachhar. It was not until 1956 that a rural agriculturist, Partap Singh Kairon, a rich farmer from Amritsar district, was able to become the Chief Minister with the help of the rural bloc within the Congress and the merger of Kulaks interests from the Akali Dal in the Congress party.

of canal system to provide irrigation to the eastern districts of the Punjab. The urban Hindu petty bourgeoisie sided with the Hindu rural interests and managed to use the split among the rural interests to its advantage. Any division along linguistic divisions would have split these urban interests into regions and made them weaker compared with the respective rural interests. Under the leadership of the national industrial bourgeoisie, the urban petty bourgeoisie of the united Punjab remained a dominant force. Thus, it planned a vigorous campaign to oppose the linguistic division of the state.

The strategy adopted by the opponents of the Punjabi state was to use the census process to deny the linguistic base of the demand. The Hindus of the Punjab were urged to register Hindi, not Punjabi, as their mother tongue.<sup>21</sup> The language report on the 1951 census of Punjab was never published, but it was widely believed that the majority of the Punjabi Hindus had returned their mother tongue as Hindi. With the arrival of the modern printing press in the nineteenth century in the Punjab<sup>22</sup>, the question of script assumed central stage in the group identity propagated by the religious reform movements in the Punjab. For centuries, Punjabi was written in *Urdu*, *Devnagri*, and *Gurmukhi* script. The Sikh reformers advocated the use of the *Gurmukhi* script as it was used by the Sikh Gurus to write their holy scripture<sup>23</sup>. The Gurus used a script which was popular among the traders and merchants of the times, but the language of their compositions remained *Hindvi* or *Sant Basha*, similar to modern day Hindi. Guru Gobind Singh wrote in his native dialect from Bihar, *Bhojpuri*, and the language of the intellectual elite of the *Moghul* period, *Farsi*. The 'Sikh' states of Banda and Ranjit Singh

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, the Hindu organizations like the *Jan Sangh* and *Hindu Maha Sabha* launched a campaign to include other Hindu areas of Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and some districts of Uttar Pradesh in what they called *Maha Punjab*. See Baldev Raj Nayar (1966). op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed account of Punjabi press, see Robin Jeffrey (1997). Punjabi: The 'Subliminal Change'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 (9 & 10): 443-445.

<sup>23</sup> Maharaja Ranjit Singh's administration used *Farsi*, not Punjabi, as its official language in the fashion of Mughal emperors.

used *Farsi* as the official language of their states. The Muslims used *Urdu* script, while the Hindus began propagating *Devnagri* script. A vast majority of Punjabi literature is written in *Urdu* script. Though they wrote Punjabi in different scripts, no religious community ever renounced Punjabi as their mother tongue as was the case in 1951. In view of the this linguistic polarization, the Punjab government devised three different language formulae. The first formula was the brainchild of Chief Minister Bhim Sen Sachar. Popularly known as the Sachar formula, it divided the Punjab into two linguistic regions. In the predominantly Punjabi region, the first language of instruction in schools would be Punjabi written in *Gurmukhi* script, while Hindi in *Devnagri* script would be taught as a second language. In the Hindi region, the primary language would be Hindi and the secondary language would be Punjabi. In both regions, parents were given freedom of choice in the medium of instruction of their children. The second formula was implemented in the former Sikh princely states of PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union). It was similar to Sachar formula but gave no freedom of choice to parents. The *Arya Smaji* Hindus used the freedom of choice clause to refuse the education of their children in Punjabi, even in the Punjabi region. The third formula, known as the regional formula, dealt with the language of administration by accepting both languages as working languages of the administration in the respective regions.<sup>24</sup>

The attitudes of the Sikh Kulak interests and the Sikh petty bourgeoisie were sharply different toward these developments. The Kulaks found that the new federal arrangement would work in their favor and the vehicle to further their interests was not the Akali Dal but the Congress. The Kulaks-led section of the Akali Dal supported its merger with the Congress party in 1948. However, the Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie felt dissatisfied with the new arrangements in independent India. They had to be content with

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Brass (1974). *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 338-340.

their status as junior partners to their Hindu counterparts. They aspired to have a region where they had no internal competition and were also protected from outside competitors. Thus, their leadership under Master Tara Singh, who also controlled the presidency of the Akali Dal, began demanding a Sikh homeland<sup>25</sup>. Master Tara Singh felt dissatisfied even at the prospect of a linguistic state. Instead, he advocated the creation of a majority Sikh state with some confederate status. He stated that the "Sikhs could not be saved under Hindu dominance." He added that "for the sake of religion, for the sake of culture, for the sake of *Panth*, and to keep high the flag of the Guru, the Sikhs have girded their loins to achieve independence."<sup>26</sup> What he wanted was not a linguistic state but a "Sikh state wherein the Sikhs would be in a numerical majority."<sup>27</sup> Master was able to inspire many agitations to achieve his goals, but he failed to convince the dominant Kulak interests that a Sikh homeland was in their best interests. The Kulak representatives refused his call to come out of the Congress and re-join the Akalis.<sup>28</sup>

Master Tara Singh typified the uncertainties of the petty bourgeois existence and its chameleon-like political stand. Unlike the refugees from the agricultural landowning classes, who received ownership of lands, *albeit* lower than what they owned in Pakistan, the petty bourgeoisie received no compensation for the losses it suffered during partition.

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<sup>25</sup> The concept of a Sikh homeland has remained vague in definition. The Akali leaders had advanced the idea of a separate Sikh state in the 1940s to oppose the creation of Pakistan. Giani Kartar Singh apparently reminded the British that since they had taken the Punjab from the Sikhs, "it would be logical to return it to them." See, Madhu Limaye (1985). *Sikhs: An Alien People?* in *The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response*. Edited by Abida Samuiddin, Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 558. After independence, Master Tara Singh pursued a strategy of establishing some form of Sikh majority state within India with special status for the Sikhs.

<sup>26</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar (1966). *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Partap Singh Kairon, Baldev Singh and Swarn Singh defied the calls of Master Tara Singh to rejoin the Akali Dal. Almost all the Kulak background Sikh leaders in 1950s belonged to the Congress, including the current Akali Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal.

The Hindu petty bourgeoisie was quick to move to places outside the Punjab where business opportunities were comparatively better. The majority of the Sikh petty bourgeoisie remained in the Punjab cities where Hindu traders and merchants had a virtual monopoly over the markets. Frustrated and displaced, the Sikh petty-bourgeoisie displayed a strong anti-Hindu attitude and raised the demand for a Sikh homeland. Unable to survive economically in the cities of the Punjab, the Sikh petty bourgeoisie also started shifting to cities outside the Punjab. As a result, between 1951 and 1961, the Sikh population outside the Punjab increased by 62 per cent.<sup>29</sup> The attitude of the Sikh petty bourgeoisie toward Punjabi Hindus also changed as together they were rich strangers in the non-Punjabi areas facing hostile competitors from the 'sons of the soil.' It was the common 'Hindu' bonds that became their tools to build bridges with the local populations. Master Tara Singh, who had declared that the Sikhs could never live with Hindus, became a signatory to the founding of the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) at its founding conference in 1964.<sup>30</sup>

Kulaks interests from both the Punjabi and the Hindi regions of the Punjab, however, continued to press for the linguistic division of the state. The slow departure of Sikh landed interests from the Congress began after the central government's adamant refusal to the linguistic division of the Punjab. The Punjab was not alone. The Indian state continued the colonial policy of suppression of various national aspirations of the people of different areas. The British administrative units like Madhya Pradesh, which amalgamated four historic regions into one, and the vast areas of the Uttar Pradesh were kept intact to satisfy the dominant metropolis interests who exploited the vast hinterlands

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<sup>29</sup> Rajiv Kapur (1986). *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*. London: Allen and Unwin, p. 218.

<sup>30</sup> He represented the Sikhs at the conference, which also had invited Dalai Lama to represent the Buddhists. See, Ashish Nandy et al. (1995). *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanambhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 88.

of these states. The Punjabi urban petty bourgeoisie of the Grand Trunk Road<sup>31</sup> belt served as a strong link for the industrial bourgeoisie to exploit the agricultural sector of this region. They had a powerful ally in the central leadership of the Congress. Among others, Gulzari Lal Nanda was a strong opponent of the Punjabi *suba*. With such strong pressure, it was not surprising that the States Re-Organization Commission (SRC) concluded that there was no case for dividing the present Punjab. Instead, it was recommended that PEPSU and Himachal Pradesh should be merged in the Punjab.<sup>32</sup> In defense of its conclusions, the Commission gave the following excuse:

Where border areas are not under the direct control of the Center, it would be safer to have relatively large and resourceful states....It is neither possible nor desirable to reorganize States on the basis of a single test of either language or culture; a balanced approach, which takes all relevant factors into account, is necessary.<sup>33</sup>

The denial of a Punjabi linguistic state by the Congress leadership in the center meant that the Kulak's interests could not be accommodated within the Congress party. The agitation for the Punjabi *suba* faced brutal state oppression. The arrests of thousands of Akali Sikh agitators of the Punjabi *suba* movement strengthened anti-Center and anti-Congress feelings among the Sikh masses. The Akali Dal's control over the SGPC meant that most of the Sikh temples in the state were being used to launch anti-government agitations. Kulaks could no longer maintain their political association with a party that had not only denied their claim for a linguistic state but also used brutal force to end the Punjabi *suba* agitation. In addition, Kulaks leadership felt threatened by the decision of the Communist party to support the movement for the linguistic division of the state. It

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<sup>31</sup> All major cities on this ancient trade route are well developed compared with the rest of the urban areas of the Punjab. Almost all the industry of both the Punjab and Haryana is situated in this G.T. Road belt.

<sup>32</sup> Virendra Kumar (1975), ed. *Committees and Commissions in India, 1947-73*. Volume 1, New Delhi: DK Publishing, p. 310.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.



could take a major platform away from the Kulaks, who despised the presence of Communist forces in the countryside. The Communist party, which had led a powerful anti-tenancy movement in PEPSU, had made impressive gains among the small and landless peasantry. A study of the Communist Party in Punjab found that the party's support increased rapidly between 1956 and 1958.<sup>34</sup> Support was particularly strong among the small and marginal peasantry which helped the party to reduce its membership among the middle and rich peasants from 84 percent to 50.6 percent. At the same time, its following among the poor peasants and landless labor increased substantially.<sup>35</sup> In terms of electoral support, 1957 was the peak period of support for the CP with 13.56 percent of polled votes in Punjab<sup>36</sup>. The level of support in rural areas was still higher. For the Kulaks, these were all danger signals.

The Kulaks had grown stronger with every passing year. By the early 1960s, they were in a position to sideline the petty bourgeoisie from the Sikh politics by replacing Master Tara Singh with one of their own- Sant Fateh Singh<sup>37</sup>. The new leadership immediately stopped any reference to a Sikh homeland. Much like their counterparts in Haryana movement led by powerful Hindu *Jats* like Devi Lal, the Sikh agrarian interests started advocating a Punjabi state based on the regional formula. The linguistic division would assure Sikh Kulaks a dominant role in the state executive. Sant Fateh Singh gave a call to all sections of the Punjabi society to support the *Akali* agitation for a Punjabi state. It was the beginning of agricultural capital's hegemonic claim over the linguistically demarcated home market. It sought to play a leading role in the new state by bringing other sectors of the economy, including the urban petty bourgeoisie, under its command.

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<sup>34</sup> J.S. Brar (1989). *The Communist Party in Punjab: The Politics of Survival*. Delhi: National Book Organization, p. 199.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>37</sup> The Master faction was defeated in the SGPC elections in 1962.

The growth in the strength of agricultural capital in the Punjab came at a time when the Indian state was facing its first major economic crisis.

By the mid-1960s, the Indian economy faced a serious crisis in both industrial production and food production. The United States was increasingly using food aid to arm-twist India to enter into a Western-led alliance. In order to attain self-sufficiency in food production, the Indian government shifted its agricultural strategy to adopt the High Yield Variety green revolution strategies.<sup>38</sup> It agreed to a more liberal policy for the entry of U.S. multinationals in order to increase agricultural production that would reduce India's dependence on foreign food aid. The strategy to boost production through selective and intensive agriculture focused on the already highly developed areas of Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab, where irrigation systems were more developed. Strategic national interest required a compromise with rural agrarian interests of both the Punjab and Haryana. In November 1966, the old state of Punjab was bifurcated into two states of Haryana and Punjab. Although the Kulaks of the Punjab were happy with the new division, they still raised a number of objections to the terms of partition as many Punjabi-speaking areas were attached to Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the hitherto capital of united Punjab was made a joint capital of both Punjab and Haryana, and the central government took control over the *Bhakhra-Nangal* dam project which was clearly within the boundaries of the new Punjab.

The agricultural policy shift by the central government angered some powerful agrarian interests in the non-green revolution states. As Indira Gandhi tried to resolve the contradictions arising out of the state's attempts to solve the issues of economic crisis, the Kulaks resisted any attempts to undermine their dominance. The political manifestation of these crises came in the form of a split in the Congress party. Indira Gandhi began sidelining the Kulaks based leadership of various states and started recruiting the

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 4 for the political economy of the HYV based green revolution strategies.

minorities and *dalits* in the Congress. Some powerful sections of the Kulaks turned to various regional groupings<sup>39</sup> to challenge the monopolization of political power by Indira Gandhi. As a result, the Congress was defeated in various states and returned to center with a reduced majority. In the newly formed Punjab, the Congress came short of an absolute majority by only winning 48 seats out of a total of 104. The Akali Dal won 24 seats, the Jan Sangh won 9 seats, both the Communist parties won 8 seats and 13 seats were bagged by various independents and smaller parties.<sup>40</sup> The first non-Congress ministry was formed in the Punjab under the Chief Ministership of Justice Gurnam Singh. The ministry lasted only eight months as one faction of the Akali Dal was wooed by the Congress leadership to bring down the Akali-led coalition.

The Akali Dal is dominated by rich capitalist farmers, but it also has a strong base among the middle peasantry. The position of the medium scale farmers is more volatile as almost all of them desire to join the ranks of the rich farmers but most end up in the ranks of small and marginal, or even landless peasants.<sup>41</sup> The control of rich farmers over various co-operative agencies like the co-op banks and sugar mills, and their direct control over markets through ownership of large warehouses and agro-industrial production has irked not only the small peasantry but also the medium capitalist farmers. What unites them with rich capitalist farmers is their common agenda of safeguarding agrarian interests against urban bourgeois interests. The interests of the indebted middle

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<sup>39</sup> As a result of the departure of the Sikh agriculturists from the Congress in the Punjab, the composition of the Congress Legislative party has become an overwhelmingly Hindu. In 1967, only one-third of the Congress legislatures were Hindus while two-third belonged to Sikh religion, which roughly reflected the religious composition of the state. In 1985, however, 66 per cent of the Congress legislatures were Hindus compared with only 34 per cent Sikhs. See, M.S. Dhami (1987). Shifts in the Party Support Base in 1985 Punjab Assembly Elections: A Preliminary Analysis. in *Punjab Today*. Edited by Gopal Singh, New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, p. 295.

<sup>40</sup> Robin Jeffrey (1994). *What's Happening to India?: Punjab, Ethnic Conflict and the Test for Federation*. Second Edition, London: MacMillan, p. 112.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 3 for the impact of capitalist process on the middle peasantry.

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peasantry, which has been progressively ruined, are not compatible with the interests of the rich Kulaks. The prospect of controlling state power, no matter how temporarily, makes them part company with the rich landlords. The Congress party's offer of support to one faction of the Akali Dal was aimed at breaking this Kulaks-led coalition. At the end of November 1967, an Akali faction from the middle peasantry led by Lachman Singh Gill and Dr. Jagjit Singh Chohan broke away from the party to form a new government supported by the Congress. The Congress pulled this support in August 1968, thus causing the downfall of the second ministry in as many years. The President's rule was imposed. The Akali Dal fought the next elections in 1969 with a new political partner- the *Jan Sangh*. The urban-based party of the Hindu petty bourgeoisie had vigorously opposed the creation of a Punjabi suba. The Kulaks had always resented the monopoly of this urban petty bourgeoisie over the markets for agricultural products. In addition, this class controlled the distribution centers of agricultural inputs like fertilizers and insecticides. The Congress party's attempts to build a broad-based coalition of the lower castes in the Punjab had also created anger in the ranks of the urban petty bourgeoisie. The rural and urban rich responded by building this coalition of the Akali Dal and the *Jan Sangh*, which was brought down by its inherent contradictions. While the Kulaks pushed for rural bias in development policies, including various rural community development programs, that gave them control over the resources distributed in the countryside through which rich farmers were able to win over the support of the rural masses, the urban petty bourgeoisie pushed for more developmental schemes for the urban centers to maintain their hegemony in the cities. One major bone of contention between these two competing interests has been the tax free status of the agricultural sector<sup>42</sup>. The Kulaks interests sought to pay for rural development programs through

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<sup>42</sup> The Kulak in India have resisted any efforts by the industrial bourgeoisie to impose any kind of tax on agricultural income. In 1987-88, the revenue from taxation on agriculture as proportion of total revenue of the states was 2.6 per cent for the country as

increased taxes on the trading and retail sectors, while the urban bourgeoisie vigorously opposed these attempts.

The electoral coalitions and the temporary alliances of various forces to keep a grip on power made the Kulaks realize that a Sikh majority state did not simply translate into their exclusive control of the state power. The contradiction between the haves and have-nots had sharpened to the level of open rebellion. The peasantry of *Nixalbari* in West Bengal rose in revolt against the landed classes. A section of the Communist Party of India- Marxist (CPM) broke away from the party to lead the violent overthrow of the rule of the landlords and the capitalists. The movement spread quickly to the other parts, including the Punjab. Like their counterparts in other states and the central government, the Kulaks-led Akali government of Parkash Singh Badal, one of the richest landlords of the Punjab, dealt harshly with the revolutionaries. The Communist party's support among the poor peasants and landless laborers in the countryside had never pleased the Kulaks, who had denounced them as atheists. The split in the Communist party into two factions in 1964 also split the support base of the Communist movement. The rise of *Nixalbari* in 1967 witnessed yet another split in the party between those who supported the violent overthrow of the system and those who advocated the peaceful transition to socialism. A splintered Communist movement was unable to offer a united opposition to the strong arm tactics of the Kulaks, but it sent a strong message to the propertied classes that the economically-ruined peasantry was a major threat to their rule. The revolutionary upsurge of the *Nixalbari* had come at a time when the contradictions between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie had reached the level of open conflict. The industrial crises and their attempted solution through liberalization with license-permit *raj* had

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a whole. In agriculturally rich states of Punjab and Haryana the figure was 0.3 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively. See, Jyotirindra Dasgupta (1994). Developmental Federalism: India's Evolving Institutional Enterprise. in *The Indira-Rajiv Years: The Indian Economy and Polity 1966-1991*. Edited by Nanda K. Choudhry and Salim Mansur, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 83.

sharpened the contradiction between agriculture and industry. Politically it surfaced in the arena of center-state relations.

The adoption of green revolution technologies had strengthened the economic position of the Kulaks as a result of the rise in their income. After completely sidelining the Sikh petty-bourgeoisie in the Akali Dal<sup>43</sup>, the Kulaks moved to define their political program in accordance with their interests. The major obstacle was Indira Gandhi's new coalition of the minorities and *dalits* through which she tried to solve the contradictions between the working people and the ruling classes, on the one hand, and the agricultural sector and the industry, on the other. She maneuvered to defend the overall interests of the ruling classes- the capitalist farmers and the industrial bourgeoisie. At times, the overall interests of the ruling classes demanded sacrifices on the part of certain sections of this coalition. Indira Gandhi used and intensified the divisions among the Kulaks. When the central government decided to focus on a "selective and intensive" agricultural strategy through the adoption of green revolution technologies, it favored the dominant agrarian interests of the north-western region. At the same time, the agrarian classes of this region remained divided over such issues as river water disputes. The farmers of Haryana found that their counterparts in Uttar Pradesh had major objections over the share of *Yamuna* waters. The Punjab Kulaks wanted to deny them a share in the Punjab waters. These disputes caused splits among the agrarian classes on regional lines as well as keeping their dependence on the mediation of the central government. This gave an enormous political advantage to Indira Gandhi to attempt solutions of various contradictions between industry and agriculture.

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<sup>43</sup> By 1960, the Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie controlled 53.6 percent of the key positions in the SGPC, but its numbers dwindled to negligible levels by 1970. See Parmod Kumar, Manmohan Sharma, Atul Sood and Ashwani Handa (1984). *Punjab Crisis: Context and Trends*. Chandigarh: Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, p. 37.

The Kulaks of the Punjab moved to articulate their interests against the urban petty bourgeoisie and the industrial bourgeoisie. At the end of 1972, a sub-committee was constituted by the Working Committee of the SAD to prepare a policy program for the future. The proposals of this sub-committee, popularly known as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR), were adopted by the party Working Committee in its meeting at Anandpur Sahib on 16-17 October 1973.<sup>44</sup> Apart from resolving to take up the issues of the transfer of Chandigarh, the merger of the Punjabi-speaking areas left in Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, and the river waters dispute with the central government, the resolution "endorsed the principle of State autonomy in keeping with the concept of federalism."<sup>45</sup> State autonomy meant that the "Center's interference would be restricted to Defense, Foreign Affairs, Currency and Communications; all other departments would be under the jurisdiction of the Punjab (and other states)."<sup>46</sup> The resolution dealt with a whole range of issues, from promoting Sikhism to defending the interests of the agricultural sector, but it was this autonomy resolution which has attracted the most criticism and attention. The Congress government denounced it as a "secessionist" document and refused to deal with any grievances highlighted in the *Anandpur Sahib Resolutions*.<sup>47</sup>

The focus of the resolution was on the agricultural sector, and thus it concluded that "the mainstay of the Indian economy is agriculture...yet this is a hard fact that the levers of economic powers continue to be in the hands of big traders, capitalists and monopolists." Consequently, the Akali Dal demanded that "all key industries should be

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<sup>44</sup> The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was later approved at the open session of the 18th All India Akali Conference held at Ludhiana on October 28-29, 1978 in the form of 12 resolutions.

<sup>45</sup> Text of *Anandpur Sahib Resolution*, in Abida Samiuddin, ed. (1985). *The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response*. Appendix II, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 667.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 674.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Tully and Satish Jacob (1985). *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*. London: Pan Books, p. 50.

under the public control." Further, to eliminate the power of the traders, the party "stands for complete nationalization of the wholesale trade in foodgrains through the establishment of state agencies."<sup>48</sup> Similar demands were made by other regional rural bourgeois interests all over India. As a result, the government of India decided to take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains in 1974. The government, however, was forced to withdraw because of the resistance of a powerful lobby of the wholesalers.<sup>49</sup>

The new Congress government of Punjab, which had won a landslide victory in 1972 elections, passed legislation to lower the land ceiling to 17.5 acres. Angered over the new ceiling limit, the ASR demanded a return to the old limit of 30 acres. In order to make their point that even the old ceiling of thirty acres was an anti-rural measure of the Congress party, the *Akali* leaders advocated a ceiling on urban property exceeding the value of thirty acres of agricultural land.<sup>50</sup> The ASR targeted the urban bourgeoisie and the industrial sector. It resolved to fix the wages of the industrial workers, but the same privilege could not be extended to the agricultural workers. While it decided to press for the immediate nationalization of consumer industries to "stabilize the prices of the consumer goods", it demanded that the agricultural land of the farmers must be "completely exempted from the wealth tax and the estate duty."<sup>51</sup> In the name of the poor farmers, the resolution urged the government "to abolish the excise duty on tractors so that with decrease in their prices, the ordinary farmers may also be able to purchase farm machinery."<sup>52</sup> While the resolution demanded a significant increase in the price of

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<sup>48</sup> Text of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. in Abida Samiuddin (1985). op. cit., pp. 675-76.

<sup>49</sup> C.T. Kurien (1994). *Global Capitalism and the Indian Economy*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, p. 35.

<sup>50</sup> J.S. Grewal (1996). *The Akalis: A Short History*. Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publications, p. 143.

<sup>51</sup> Text of Anandpur Sahib Resolution. op. cit., p. 671.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 670.



farm produce, it called for considerable reduction "in the prices of farm machinery like tractors, tubewells and other inputs."<sup>53</sup>

The *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution made it abundantly clear that the Akali Dal was a political vehicle through which the Kulaks pushed their agenda. Sikhism provided an ideological platform to camouflage the demands of capitalist farmers. The Indian industrial bourgeois class came exclusively from a Hindu religious background. Thus, as a part of its political strategy, the contradiction between industry and agriculture was depicted as an attempt by Hindu industrial interests to dominate Sikh agriculturists. The ASR stated that "the Shiromani Akali Dal is the very embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the Sikh nation and as such fully entitled to its representation."<sup>54</sup> The Kulaks sought to diminish the influence of left forces among the small peasants and poorer sections of the Sikh population by declaring them atheists. The party of the Kulaks resolved to propagate Sikhism and "its religious conduct and denunciation of atheism." The party also vowed to preserve the "distinct and independent" identity of the Sikhs, and sought to "create an environment in which the national sentiments and aspirations of the Sikh *Panth* will find full expression, satisfaction and growth."<sup>55</sup>

The strategy of the Kulaks was to push their demands in the ideological framework of Sikhism through their control over organizations like the Akali Dal and the SGPC. The capitalist transformation in agriculture had divorced a large number of small and marginal Sikh peasants, including the middle peasantry, from the means of production, the land.<sup>56</sup> By early 1970s, in fact, the majority of the rural Sikhs were either landless or marginal farmers with only small plots of land. In face of this reality, an appeal to the community of agriculturists would have had a limited audience in the

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 669.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 671.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 672.

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 3.

countryside. Any appeals to the caste loyalty of *Jatts* would have left the field open for the urban bourgeoisie interests to snatch away the loyalties of the non-*Jatts*. Sikhism provided an ideological bond through which a majority of the state's population, and a vast majority of the ruralites, could be mobilized to keep intact the class hegemony of the Kulak. The fact that no Sikh occupied any position in the big bourgeois camp<sup>57</sup> made it easy for agrarian interests to identify the industrial bourgeoisie as Hindu. Thus, in the political propaganda of the Kulaks, the contradiction between agriculture and industry became a clash of interests between "majority Hindus" and "minority Sikhs." The Kulaks made use of various Sikh shrines to launch political agitations in defense of their demands. The famous *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution was passed in an historic Sikh shrine associated with the birth of the *Khalsa* and the exploits of the tenth Guru. It is in this context that the Kulaks have maintained their strong grip over the SGPC, which controls all Sikh temples and shrines of the region.

### **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhik Committee**

This elected "Sikh parliament" of 190<sup>58</sup> members has its headquarters in the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar. The SGPC not only controls the Golden Temple but also has several hundred other Sikh *Gurdwaras* and shrines in the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh<sup>59</sup>. Since every village in the Punjab has a *Gurdwara*, it

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<sup>57</sup> With the exception of Ranbaxy, a giant pharmaceutical company, the Sikh capital has no place in the upper echelons of the Indian industrial bourgeoisie dominated by 'Hindu' capitalists.

<sup>58</sup> 170 members are directly elected on the basis of adult suffrage by the Sikh voters. 15 members are co-opted by the elected body and 5 chiefs of *Takhats* (Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, Damdama Sahib, Patna Sahib and Nanded Sahib) automatically become members.

<sup>59</sup> The shrines and temples outside these three states are run by local committees. The most powerful of these is the Delhi Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee, controlled by powerful Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. The Kulaks led SGPC has demanded the inclusion of all these committees in the All-India Gurdwara Act to bring

gives the Kulaks a ready-made stage to conduct their political propaganda. The local priests and management of these temples are under the direct control of the SGPC. From the fear of losing their jobs, they remain loyal to their masters in Amritsar. The power of this body is such that the president of the SGPC is considered "virtually a parallel Chief Minister of the Punjab."<sup>60</sup> Ever since its inception in 1925, the Akali Dal has never lost control of the SGPC. In fact, the outcome of its intra-party feuds has also been decided by this body. The faction that controls the SGPC also calls itself the genuine Shiromani Akali Dal and the true representative of the Sikh *Panth*. In independent India, elections have been held five times for this premiere institution. The SGPC elections are fought on basically the same issues as the elections to the state legislature<sup>61</sup>. The absence of other political parties in these elections make it easier for the Kulaks to secure victory. As a result, in every election since its inception, the SAD has remained victorious and the faction that controlled the SGPC also remained dominant in the Punjab legislature.

Though the Congress party and other secular political parties have never contested the elections to SGPC directly, they have indirectly supported various

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these shrines and temples under their control. The demand has been vigorously opposed by these committees. See Chapter 5.

<sup>60</sup> Robin Jeffrey (1994). *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>61</sup> I was able to observe the October 1996 election to the SGPC during my field trip in the Punjab. Apart from attending political rallies in major towns and cities, I witnessed the campaign of an *Akali* candidate from Mansa by traveling with him to over 40 villages and towns in a period of four days. Giani Raghbir Singh, who won the seat with comfortable margin, did not make a single reference to any 'religious' issue. He spoke about the farmers' concerns for higher prices for agricultural produce and lower prices for agricultural inputs. In every meeting, he reminded his audience of how the Sikh farmers of the state were discriminated against by the central government of India which paid them 10 Rs. less for a quintal of rice compared with their Hindu counterparts in Haryana. He also repeated the *Akali Dal's* promise to provide free electricity to farmers. The entire election campaign was dominated by the promises of the Akali Dal to the farmers of the Punjab. From the political promises to the conduct of the campaign, in which countrymade liquor flowed freely, it was difficult to imagine that the electoral exercise was for a religious body not for the state legislature.

coalitions against the *Akali Dal*. Realizing that more is at stake than its annual budget of Rs. 940 million (1997-98 budget), which is audited by the government auditor, the Congress has never ceased its struggle to remove its main electoral opponent from this religious power seat. The Congress has leveled charges against the SAD ranging from the heresy of mixing religion and politics in a secular and democratic society, to accusations of embezzlement of donation money. Gurcharn Singh Tohra, who was elected to the office of the President<sup>62</sup> of the SGPC for the twenty-third time in 1996, replied to these charges by stating that:

Religion and politics are not two things in Sikhism. The *Gurdwara* funds are used in the best interests of the *Panth*, including its political interests. If the Congress regime has any grudge against the SAD on this account, let it make the process of auditing the SGPC accounts more rigorous and appoint two government auditors instead of one.<sup>63</sup>

Apart from the domain of politics, the SGPC has a large say in almost all matters concerning the Sikh community. It appoints the *Jathedar* (Chief) of *Akal Takhat*, who issues *Hukamnamas* (Orders) on various aspects of Sikhism, including excommunication of individuals from the Sikh *Panth*. As he can be removed by the SGPC, the *Jathedar* never dares to go against the interests of the controlling faction of the Akali Dal. The SGPC also publishes and updates the codes of conduct that affect the life of the entire community.<sup>64</sup> The organization controls the management of medical and engineering colleges that are funded by the SGPC. Control over schools, religious missionary

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<sup>62</sup> The President of the SGPC is elected for the period of one year by all the elected members based on the principle of simple majority.

<sup>63</sup> Gobinder Singh (1986). op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>64</sup> It publishes a great variety of literature related to Sikhism. Some of its most recent publications include the following: *Sikhism and Politics* (1995); *The Truth About the Sikhs* (1995); *Raj Karega Khalsa* (1995); *Notes Toward the Definition of a Sikh* (1995); *The Golden Temple: Its Theo-Political Status* (1995); *Sikhs as Liberators* (1996); and *The Sikh Religion: An Outline of its Doctrines* (1996).

activities, appointments of priests and preachers, and a huge bureaucracy means that there is an enormous patronage network in the hands of the leadership of the SGPC.

Sikhism has provided a religious metaphor that is a part of the Akali leader's political communication. The sounds of *Wahegur Jee Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Jee Ki Fateh* (The *Khalsa* belongs to God, the victory also belongs to God) greet the assembled masses in the Sikh shrines. The agitations are launched with the reciting of the Sikh prayers that end with the call of *Raj Karega Khalsa* (the *Khalsa* shall rule). The emotions run high when the Akali leaders declare *Panth noo khatra hai* (the *Panth* is in danger). Whether it was the issue of the Punjabi *Suba*, or the issue of autonomy or better prices for farm produce, the agitations were launched from the premises of historic Sikh shrines. The aim of these agitations has been quite secular- to maintain Kulaks dominance. Summing up this use of religion for secular aims, Bomball stated that "in its quest for political power, it was perhaps natural for the *Akali Dal* to project itself from its very inception as the political arm of the *Panth* with the articulation, and defense and consolidation of a separate Sikh identity, as its principle political objective."<sup>65</sup> Bomball, however, has failed to capture the essence of Akali politics, which is to safeguard the interests of the Kulaks. The Akali Dal and the SGPC have become political vehicles to portray the economic and political interests of the Kulaks as common interests of all the Sikhs.

Another important feature of Akali politics has been the use of metaphor and vocabulary from the eighteenth century Sikh heroic tradition and nineteenth century Sikh rule. In the words of Master Tara Singh "a Sikh can either be a ruler or a rebel."<sup>66</sup> The phrases *Raj Bina Naa Dharm Chale Hai* (Religion cannot survive without state power)

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<sup>65</sup> K.R. Bomball (1986). Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Federal Polity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (20): 888.

<sup>66</sup> Gopal Singh (1994). *Politics of Sikh Homeland*. New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, p. 91.

and *Jo Arre So Jhare* (Anyone who clashes with the *Panth* is doomed) are integral parts of the political speeches of Akali politicians. In this way, the traditions born in the struggles of the producing classes against oppression and exploitation are appropriated to maintain the hegemony of the propertied classes. The essential teachings of Sikhism against an unjust social order, exploitation and oppression are conveniently forgotten as they do not serve the interests of the dominant propertied classes who control the power houses of the Sikh politics. Devoid of its revolutionary content, the religious shell of Sikhism has become a useful tool to keep intact the hegemony of the propertied classes over the producing classes.

In conclusion, we can see that in order to maintain its hegemony, the class of capitalist farmers has used Sikhism as an ideology to fight the challenge of commercial and industrial bourgeois interests. The mobilization of the rural masses behind the program of the capitalist farmers was necessary as the contradiction between industry and agriculture sharpened to new levels in the 1970s. Since the early 1970s, the terms of trade had clearly moved against the agricultural sector.<sup>67</sup> A study on the production costs and procurement prices of wheat concluded that whereas the rate of return in wheat was 24.50 per cent in 1970-71, it fell to 2.23 per cent in 1973-74 and by 1977-78, the rate of return was only 1.32 per cent.<sup>68</sup> As a result, capitalist farmers led various agitations demanding lower rates for such inputs as electricity, water, tractors, fertilizers and pesticides. The *Bharatya Kisan Union* (BKU), an organization of the rich farmers, launched agitations for lower electric and water rates in 1974-75, and against revenue

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<sup>67</sup> A.S. Kahlon and D.S. Tiyaagi (1980). Inter-Sectoral Terms of Trade. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 (52): A-181. Another study concluded that "the agricultural terms of trade worsened in the fifties, improved in the sixties and worsened in the early seventies." Ashok V. Desai (1981). Factors Underlying the Slow Growth of Indian Industry. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 (10, 11 & 12): 382.

<sup>68</sup> Sucha Singh Gill and K.C. Singhal (1984). Punjab Farmers Agitation: Response to Development Crisis of Agriculture. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (40): 1729.

and commercial taxes on agricultural products in 1975.<sup>69</sup> The BKU also gave a wholehearted support to the *Akalis* in their political agitation. The Kulaks of the Punjab joined the JP<sup>70</sup> movement, which had attracted the support of various regional agrarian landed interests, in their struggle against the central government headed by Indira Gandhi. On the other hand, industrial interests supported Mrs. Gandhi's strong arm tactics to suppress Kulaks-led agitations. Thus, the political struggle waged in the domain of center-state relations was nothing but a power struggle between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie. The industrial bourgeoisie came to dominate the center of the Indian federation while the power of the Kulaks remained in the state executives. The events that unfolded in the Punjab and at the national level in India in the 1970s were the outcome of this political tug-of-war between agriculture and industry.

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Political Economy of Center-State Relations**

The division of powers in the Indian constitution of 1950 between the Center and the States had satisfied, to a large extent, the rich agrarian interests and the industrial bourgeoisie. While agrarian interests dominated the state executives, they managed to share power with industrial capital at the center. The conflicts between industrial and agricultural interests, reflected in center-state tensions, were managed through the intra-party mechanisms as the Congress dominated the political scene both in states and the center. The agricultural crisis, reflected in the famines, and the industrial crisis of the mid-1960s altered the hitherto workable political solution. The new agricultural strategy favored the Kulak interests of the agricultural developed areas with plenty of irrigation as the central government decided to adopt the High Yield Variety (HYV) green revolution technologies to end dependence on foreign food aid. The United States provided food aid with the aim of forcing India into its orbit in its struggle against the socialist bloc, which had provided huge assistance to India to develop heavy industries and other infrastructure. The adoption of HYV green revolution technologies also meant that India had to open its doors to foreign agro-industrial capital. In order to boost industrial production, the state agreed to liberalization terms under its command. The poor performance of both the industrial and the agricultural sectors, which had only benefited a rich minority, also produced mass unrest which resulted in political unrest of a revolutionary character in 1967.

It was an attempted solution to all these crises that produced a trend toward centralization of powers. The focus of the green revolution strategy on a few areas in the north-west angered the agrarian interests in the non-green revolution states. Once the levels of "self-sufficiency" were achieved in agricultural production in 1972, industrial capital pushed for the use of agricultural surplus in the industrial sector and for an end to a favorable treatment of the agricultural sector, which included large scale subsidies and



tax free income. Indira Gandhi's panacea to resolve the major contradiction between agriculture and industry demanded an end to the powerful grip of the regional Kulak leaders. She devised a strategy of relying on minorities and the subaltern classes to sideline the Kulak, who dominated the provincial wings of the Congress party and government executives. This led to factionalism in the Congress, on the one hand, and the creation of the regional parties, on the other. While agrarian interests continued to play a role in central government, the main sphere of their domination remained the provincial jurisdictions. The industrial bourgeoisie, to a large extent, continued to rely on central government to safeguard its interests. The struggle between these two levels of the government was a reflection of the contradiction between the two leading sectors of the economy, agriculture and industry. The Congress party, in a system similar to the federal institutions, was able to provide an internal mechanism to various interests at state and federal levels to resolve their differences with the help of the central leadership dominated by Nehru for the first two decades after independence. The state level and federal leadership of the Congress party had managed to overcome their differences through give and take in the legislatures and other forums as the Congress dominated the political scene. The crisis of the 1960s changed the internal conflict resolution mechanism of the Congress party permanently.

This attempted solution produced a trend in the center-state relations that witnessed the enhanced role of the center of the union compared with the provincial jurisdictions. It also strengthened the role of the Indian industrial bourgeoisie to the disadvantage of the Kulaks. Ignoring the class nature of this center-state tug of war, various studies have focused on the impact of this 'centralization' on selective regional and ethnic problems in India. The Punjab impasse, according to Brass, was reached "because the struggle for power at the Center of the Indian Union passed the limits

required for the functioning of a balanced federal parliamentary system."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Bomball has blamed the centralized nature of the Indian federation for producing the Punjab crisis and seeks its remedy in a "shift from the prevailing patron-client pattern of Center-State relations towards a partnership model."<sup>2</sup> While Brass and Bomball have rightly assumed that this centralization trend began with the rise of Indira Gandhi to power and reached its peak during her reign in power, they have not explained how she was able to concentrate such powers in the center, and what led to such centralization. The political economy school, on the other hand, hold that the sharpening of the contradiction between the agriculture and the industry produced a trend in the Indian federation that led to the concentration of powers in central government. Sathyamurthy contends that "throughout the 70s and 80s, the tension between the industrial capitalist forces and the rural rich has been aggravated, with the center-state relations providing the political arena in which they are manifested."<sup>3</sup> Others have suggested that centralization is a product of Indira Gandhi's adoption of populist ideology to overcome political crisis of an extra-parliamentary nature expressed in the popular movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>4</sup> The psychological explanation has focused on Indira Gandhi's personality to explain the concentration of powers in the hands of the central government. Puri argues that Mrs. Gandhi had always viewed herself "in the role of Joan of Arc." She concentrated all powers in her hands as she was "lonely, insecure, suspicious, self-centered and ambitious."<sup>5</sup> She may have been all these things, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Brass (1994). *The Politics of India since Independence*. Second Edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> K.R. Bomball (1986). Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Federal Polity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (20): 890.

<sup>3</sup> T.V. Sathyamurthy (1989). Impact of Center-State Relations on Indian Politics: An Interpretative Reckoning, 1947-87. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 (38): 2133.

<sup>4</sup> Javeed Alam (1982). Congress Party: Consensus Politics to Autocratic Regime. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 17 (28 & 29): 1143-1144.

<sup>5</sup> Balraj Puri (1985). Era of Indira Gandhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 20 (4): 148.

role of the social sciences is to investigate her role as a statesman. As Prime Minister, she managed the affairs of the state for a decade and a half. It is this political role of Indira Gandhi that needs to be analyzed. The political economy explanation provides a framework of analysis which seeks to explain how centralization is a product of the state's attempts to solve the contradictions among the ruling classes, on the one hand, and between the ruling classes and the producing classes, on the other. Thus, it is important not only to study the context of her attempted solutions to these contradictions but also the context of her rise to power.

### **The Centralization**

Indira Gandhi assumed premiership of the Indian state at a time when both main sectors of the economy- the agriculture and the industry- were facing serious production crises. The droughts of 1965 and 1966 were accompanied by a fall in production in the industrial sector. The rate of industrial production, which grew at an annual rate of 7.8 percent between 1955 and 1965, fell to a growth of only 3.7 per cent in the period between 1965 and 1975.<sup>6</sup> In the second half of the 1960s, the Indian state was faced with a dilemma of recurring droughts and falling industrial productions. The dependence on foreign food aid, mainly from the United States, made it vulnerable to arm-twisting tactics of the capitalist bloc. In order to put an end to the recurring famines, the state adopted the U.S.-imposed solution of the green revolution technologies which came in the form of HYV seeds under the auspices of the foreign agro-industrial sector. The Indian state accepted the demand for liberalization of its industrial policy to allow the entry of various consumer and agro-industries. Under pressure from the international capital, the Rupee was devalued at 57.5 per cent against the US dollar.<sup>7</sup> As a result,

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<sup>6</sup> C. Rangarajan (1982). Industrial Growth: Another Look. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 (14, 15 & 16): 589.

<sup>7</sup> Pronab Sen (1986). The 1966 Devaluation in India: A Reappraisal. *Economic and*

inflation ran at a rate of 12 per cent in 1965-66 period and 15 per cent in 1968. The enormity of the crisis was felt in the annual budgets as real public expenditures declined by about 5 per cent in 1966-67 and by 11 per cent in 1967-68.<sup>8</sup> The producing classes bore the brunt of the crisis. They fell victims to recurring droughts and famines. The dissatisfaction of the masses was reflected in the rise of a powerful revolutionary movement- the *Nixalbari*. Led by Charu Mazumdar, the movement spread from its base in West Bengal to many other parts of India, including the Punjab.

The political manifestation of the crisis also came in the form of splits in various political parties. As the newly-elected Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, attempted to provide political solutions to the existing crisis, the all-powerful Congress party also suffered a major split in its ranks. Indira Gandhi's decision to adopt HYV green revolution technologies in selected areas of the north-west, under pressure from the United States to boost food production to attain self-sufficiency in food grains, angered agrarian interests in the non-green revolution states. Under pressure to boost industrial production, she also accepted limited liberalization under state control. The adoption of new policies only sharpened the contradiction between agriculture and industry to new heights. Faced with strong opposition from regional Congress leaders from the dominant agrarian classes and the revolutionary violence of the masses of landless and the poor, Indira Gandhi needed to strengthen her grip over the Congress party. She devised a political strategy to mobilize the minorities consisting of Muslims, *dalits*, and the lumpen strata. The Congress had previously relied on the powerful regional Kulak leaders from the economically-dominant castes and classes to provide mass support and stability to the system. As various development funds were channeled through the institutions and structure controlled by the powerful agrarian interests, they were able to buy the loyalty

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*Political Weekly*, 21 (30): 1322.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

of a carefully picked elite from the subaltern classes. Thus, this ruling elite "through its directive control over the productive processes and its moral-cultural hegemony" provided "a politically stable environment for national state initiatives in support of capitalist development."<sup>9</sup> While capitalist development benefited the agrarian landed classes, especially the upper middle and the rich peasantry, it provided no material satisfaction for the masses of the landless and the poor. The revolutionary upsurge of the *Nixalbari* was a manifestation of their discontent with the status quo. According to a political observer, Indira Gandhi assumed that the "lower orders of people were becoming less inclined to vote on the basis of primordial controls, and soon the former system of indirect, partly patriarchal, control would have to be replaced by something else."<sup>10</sup> That something else came in the form of an alliance of minorities and *dalits*, which sidelined various regional Congress leaders from the dominant agrarian classes.

This strategy produced various alignments and realignments in the political parties, both at the state and central levels. In the Punjab, the majority of the Kulaks came over to the Akali Dal. This also produced splits in the SAD as the Kulaks entry challenged the leadership of the urban petty-bourgeoisie in the party. In 1960, the urban Sikh petty bourgeois interests controlled 53.6 per cent of the key positions in the SGPC, but their numbers dwindled to a negligible level by the end of 1960s.<sup>11</sup> The Kulaks of the Punjab, along with Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, were the early beneficiaries of the green revolution technologies. Despite Indira Gandhi's political strategies to counter their dominance, the Kulaks grew stronger both economically and politically. In the

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<sup>9</sup> Jayant Lele (1994). A Welfare State in Crisis?: Reflections on the Indira-Rajiv Era. in Nanda K. Choudhary and Salim Mansur, eds. *The Indira-Rajiv Years: The Indian Economy and Polity 1966-1991*. Toronto: University of Toronto, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj (1986). Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (38 & 39): 1699.

<sup>11</sup> Parmod Kumar et al (1984). *Punjab Crisis: Context and Trends*. Chandigarh: Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, p. 47.

sphere of provincial legislature, between 1946 and 1966, only 29 per cent of the ministers in Punjab belonged to the agricultural sector, but their numbers rose to 51.4 per cent from 1967 to 1980.<sup>12</sup> The significant rise of ministers belonging to the agricultural sector was mainly due to the formations of four Kulaks-led Akali ministries in the second period.

The strength of the Kulaks, especially at the state levels, produced demands for more exclusive jurisdictions under their control. As the terms of trade began shifting against agriculture in the 1970s, the Kulaks intensified their struggle to achieve higher prices for their products and lower prices for industrial goods. After achieving "self-sufficiency" in food in 1972, the industrial bourgeoisie started exerting a strong pressure on the central policy makers to invest agricultural surplus in the industrial sector. Proposals were put forward to introduce some measurement of tax on agricultural income and to end agricultural subsidies.<sup>13</sup> The Kulaks not only successfully resisted these pressures but demanded an end to the urban bourgeoisie's control over the markets. The central government accepted the proposal to nationalize markets in 1974 but had to reverse its decision in the face of stiff opposition from the urban petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie which controlled the markets. The Kulaks also demanded an end to state duties on imported farm machinery, which were put in place to protect the domestic industrial bourgeoisie from competition, as high costs of farm machinery drove up the cost of agricultural production.<sup>14</sup> In a sense, the agrarian capitalist classes demanded a direct link with the world capitalist markets to in order to buy and sell.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> When he was a member of the planning board, Manmohan Singh admitted that a proposal for the desirability of agricultural income tax was discussed but the fear of stiff opposition from the agrarian classes made it impossible to adopt such proposal. See Harish K. Puri (1983). Green Revolution and its Impact on Punjab Politics. *The Indian Political Science Review*, 17 (1): 105.

<sup>14</sup> For a summary of these demands, see Chapter 5.

Though the Kulaks have wielded considerable power at the center of the Indian Union, it is industrial bourgeoisie which has relied almost exclusively on the levers of the central government. The dominant position of the Kulak in the state executives has given rise to the political agenda of de-centralization. Hence the Akali Dal's demand for the transfer of all powers to the states except communications, currency, defense and foreign affairs. The industrial bourgeoisie, on the other hand, has favored a strong center to protect its interests not only against the agricultural sector but also against foreign capitalist competition. Indira Gandhi's attempts to resolve the contradictions between agriculture and industry, on the one hand, and between the ruling classes and the producing classes, on the other, led to the centralization of decision making which frustrated the Kulaks as they were unable to play a more dominant role, especially when their economic power had strengthened considerably. Even in the domain of agriculture, which strictly speaking is a state subject, the Kulaks felt annoyed over the central government's encroachment on its jurisdiction over inter-state trade and commerce, formation of trading corporations, and formation of statutory and autonomous bodies in the field of agricultural prices.<sup>15</sup> One such body- the Agricultural Prices Commission- was set up in 1965 to "advise the government on a continuing basis with regard to the prices of agricultural commodities."<sup>16</sup> The central control over such bodies has not gone well with the Kulaks, especially when the Commission fails to oblige them with a steep rise in food grain prices. The industrial bourgeoisie, however, considers it a necessary tool to control the price of food as it directly affects its production costs.

The Kulaks have also raised objections to central control over the civil service<sup>17</sup>, the paramilitary forces, planning, finance, appointment of state Governors, various

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<sup>15</sup> Government of India (1990). *National Policy Studies*. Edited by Subash C. Kashyap, New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> G.S. Gupta (1980). Agricultural Prices Policy and Farm Incomes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 (39): A-139.

<sup>17</sup> The officers of all-India services like the Indian Administration Services (IAS) and the

emergency powers, and the Presidential veto over state legislation. The divisions of powers in the 1950 constitution had given the Kulaks an exclusive jurisdiction over the law and order which they have used to maintain their domination. The creation of the central police forces and the paramilitary forces, which the central government deployed in various states without, at times, Kulaks approval and, in the 1970s agitations, against Kulaks forces, was a major intrusion in the state jurisdiction. The opposition of the Kulaks to this intrusion in their exclusive jurisdiction was loud and clear which the Sarkaria Commission<sup>18</sup> noted was not even in the concurrent list. After declaring certain areas 'disturbed' under the emergency powers, the center sent paramilitary forces under its command to states to 'restore law and order.' The Commission's conclusion pleased the Kulaks as it stated that "apart from being outside the provisions of the Constitution, the development of central police has compounded the problem of effective law and order maintenance in the states. Instead of developing an effective police force of their own for immediate deployment, the states have been made dependent on the Central Government for supply of paramilitary forces."<sup>19</sup>

The Kulaks have also vehemently protested against the appointment system of the state Governors, who are appointed by the Prime Minister without any input from the state executive. The role played by these centrally appointed Governors have often been pro-center. What the Kulaks have resented is the power of the Governors to recommend the dismissal of the state governments. The Sarkaria Commission noted that "the part played by some Governors, particularly in recommending the President's rule and in

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Indian Police Services (IPS) take precedent over the officers of the provincial civil service (PCS).

<sup>18</sup> As the criticism of centralization of powers by the Kulak became stronger, Indira Gandhi appointed the Sarkaria Commission in the 1980s to study the state of federal-provincial relations.

<sup>19</sup> B.L. Fadia and R.K. Menaria (1990). *Sarkaria Commission Report and Center-State Relations*. Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, p. 56



reserving the State Bills for the consideration of the President, has evoked strong sentiment....Many Governors, looking forward to further tenure under the Union government, came to regard themselves as agents of the Union."<sup>20</sup> The resentment of the Kulaks against these developments showed that the political compromise reached in 1950 between the dominant agrarian classes and industrial bourgeoisie was under serious strain. The Commission reported:

The conclave of the non-Congress Chief Ministers in the south, the mounting Akali agitation on the basis of their Anandpur Sahib charter of demands, with the demand for autonomy in its core, and the criticism by the Marxist party of central interference in the affairs of the States were all index of widespread dissatisfaction of Center-State relations.<sup>21</sup>

The Kulaks have turned such issues into political weapons to advocate more powers to the states. The political tug of war between the two leading sectors of the economy produced a series of political clashes which were not limited to the legislature or the constitutional domains. It also meant that the ruling classes were no longer able to rule in the old ways. Political opposition to capitalist rule erupted in violent struggles. Differences apart, the ruling classes dealt harshly with any opposition to their rule. In the Punjab, both the Akali and the Congress governments relied heavily on "torture, harassment of family members, arbitrary arrests, killing in fake encounters<sup>22</sup> and supporting rival unions or other forces to threaten and destroy the power base of the leftists."<sup>23</sup> The army was mobilized to crush the *Nixalbari* rebellion in West Bengal. It was not the first time, however, that the army was called on domestic duty. During 1951-

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> The practice of "fake encounters", also known as extra judicial killings, refers to the police and the army tactics used to kill arrested suspects instead of producing them before the courts.

<sup>23</sup> Bharat Dogra (1986). Punjab: Communal Tensions and Left Forces. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (14): 565.

70, the army was called to suppress domestic violence on approximately 474 occasions.<sup>24</sup> The trend has continued but the role of the army has been substituted more and more by paramilitary forces. Since the mid 1960s, paramilitary forces have witnessed an enormous increase in their ranks. The Border Security Force (BSF), for example, started as a 25-battalion force in 1965, has undergone a nearly six-fold increase, with 147 battalions.<sup>25</sup> In 1992, apart from a standing army of 1,265,000, paramilitary forces had a total strength of 392,000. The total expenditure on paramilitary forces has increased from Rs. 320 million in 1965-66 to over Rs. 5 billion in 1984-85.<sup>26</sup>

This coercive apparatus was needed as the state was unable to meet the rising expectations of the people in an environment of dwindling fortunes for the vast majority. As "the trickle down effect of the earlier Nehruvian period did not fulfill the aspirations of the marginalized sections of the society," the Congress "took to populism to attract the discontented elements who responded favorably."<sup>27</sup> Indira Gandhi nationalized the banks and ended the privy purses of the princes. She adopted leftist rhetoric and populism which helped her to "consolidate her position as the champion of the people."<sup>28</sup> The image of Indira became the image of Hindu goddess *Durga*, the destroyer of the wicked. In a highly sensational atmosphere, any opposition to Indira Gandhi's rule was interpreted as a threat to national unity and integrity. 'Indira is India' and '*Garibi Hatao*' (remove poverty) became the most popular slogans of the times. As she hand-picked regional and national leaders from the subaltern classes, who had no independent political base of their own, she established her dominance in the party. The Congress party had long

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen P. Cohen (1990). *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> *India Today*, March 31, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> B.L. Fadia and R.K. Menaria (1990). *Sarkaria Commission Report and Center-State Relations*. Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> Jayant Lele (1994). *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> Javeed Alam (1982). Congress Party: Consensus Politics to Autocratic Regime. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 (28 & 29): 1143.

encouraged rivalry at state levels to check the power of regional bosses. It left room for political and diplomatic negotiations to reach settlements. The new leaders, like Giani Zail Singh of Punjab, were totally dependent upon the patronage of Indira Gandhi for their positions. Without their own political power base, these leaders were brought in to set parallel centers of power to reduce the hold of the Kulaks in the political domain. It was also far easier to remove them. The net affect of "this personalization of politics by Indira Gandhi was development of a political sycophancy unheard of and unknown in any working democracy."<sup>29</sup> The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, D. Anajaiyya said that "if Mrs. Gandhi tells it is a day during the night he will say it is a day."<sup>30</sup> After accepting the Congress party's offer of candidacy for the President of India, Giani Zail Singh stated that "he would sweep the streets if Mrs. Gandhi ordered it."<sup>31</sup> With such sycophants around, Indira Gandhi was not far off the mark when, referring to her cabinet colleagues, she stated that she was "surrounded by a bunch of idiots."<sup>32</sup>

The strategy to rely upon minorities and *dalits* only satisfied the upper echelons of these communities who were incorporated into the state. The rest of the masses continued to suffer from the miseries of daily life imposed by the system which only favored those with ownership of the means of production. Neither leftist rhetoric nor populism could reverse the trend of worsening economic plight of those sections of the society who were mobilized into political action by Indira Gandhi. According to one observer, the "people were kept patriotic and quiescent by the distribution of 5 per cent of patronage and 95 per cent of expectations."<sup>33</sup> A new period of mass mobilizations began in the early 1970s. The serious food shortages of 1972-73 were accompanied by

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<sup>29</sup> P.M. Kamnath (1993). *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Balraj Puri (1985). Era of Indira Gandhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (4): 148.

<sup>33</sup> K.B. (1985). Indira Gandhi: An Attempt at a Political Appraisal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (12): 497.

rampant inflation. The food shortages in the state of Gujrat in December 1973 started a chain of events that proved highly destabilizing for the ruling Congress and its leadership. The shooting of students in Gaya in the state of Bihar and the crushing of the Railway workers' strike of 1974 by repression only sparked more unrest. The new movement was led by a Gandhian from Bihar- Jay Prakash Narain (popularly known as JP). Whereas most of the popular movements, with the exception of regional trends, of the 1950s and 1960s were led by the leftist forces, the new movement was led by the rightist forces. The Communist Party of India was supporting the Congress against this "rightist insurrection." Since independence, the Communist movement had debated the issue of the nature of the Indian bourgeoisie and the party's attitude toward the bourgeois state. The party's analysis went through several pendulum swings over this cardinal issue. Overall, the party maintained that the Indian state was a bourgeois state. The Communist party debated its tactical line of support to the national bourgeoisie against imperialism. After a split in 1964 over question of support for the Communist Party of China and the nature of Indian revolution, one faction- Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M)- adopted a hostile attitude toward the Congress party, the main bourgeois party. The Communist Party of India (CPI), however, maintained a positive attitude toward the Congress, especially after the split of 1969 in the Congress ranks. In this split, a powerful faction of the Kulaks, popularly known as the syndicate, walked away from the Mrs. Gandhi-led Congress. The Communist party extended its support to Indira Gandhi against the rightist syndicate. It also entered into an electoral alliance with Indira Congress in 1971 and 1972 elections. Though the party made considerable electoral gains through this alliance, it was never able to participate in the agitations caused by worsening economic situation in the country<sup>34</sup>. The CPI(M) had suffered a jolt as the

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<sup>34</sup> At its eleventh Congress in Bathinda in 1978, Satpal Dang, the leader of party's Punjab unit, stated that "the CPI had made a wrong and reformist assessment of the Indira Gandhi and its Government and such sections of the bourgeoisie as it was supposed to

peasant uprising of 1967 occurred under its rule in West Bengal. A small faction of its leadership came over to support the *Nixalbari* and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML). The CPI-ML suffered from numerous splits while its cadres faced brutal police and army onslaughts. Scores of activists of the *Nixalbari* were arrested, tortured, and killed in fake encounters. Weakened by internal splits and brutal state oppression, the left force was unable to provide leadership to the discontented. The void was filled by the powerful force of the Kulaks and its regional based organizations. Thus, the JP movement came to symbolize the power of the class of capitalist farmers.

JP was proposing the resumption of the earlier alliance between the Kulaks and industrial bourgeoisie which had existed under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. Indira Gandhi's political strategy to weaken the Kulaks had broken that alliance. The Kulaks forces all over India intensified their struggle against Indira Gandhi's onslaught on their power. Under JP's leadership, they were able to mobilize opposition to the worsening economic situation under their command. In the Punjab, a big JP rally was organized in Ludhiana in October 1974 by the Akali Dal. The party also participated in an all-India JP rally organized in the capital in June 1975. Thus, the Akali Dal was able to mobilize the discontented forces in the Punjab under its command. As Indira Gandhi had basically eliminated the need for mass mobilizers in the party, it had no popular force to counter the JP wave. A powerful blow came in a form of judicial decision on June 12, 1975 when the Allahabad High Court invalidated her election. The JP movement got a shot in the arm and started demanding her resignation in the wake of the judicial decision against her. As the highly dispersed class of capitalist farmers came to the forefront of this popular upsurge of the discontented, the "ruling class political differences from being a preserve of inter party dealings, legislative chambers and

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represent." Cited in J.S. Brar (1989). *The Communist Party in Punjab: The Politics of Survival*. New Delhi: National Book Organization, p. 169.

bureaucratic corridors became a matter of popular confrontations and street struggles."<sup>35</sup>  
 In these battles, the ruling party's bidding was done by a network of "gangsters and sycophants backed by naked police power who could do the bidding of the higher authorities."<sup>36</sup>

### **The Goon Squads**

This political gangsterism was a by-product of the sector of economic activity that outperformed all other sectors: predatory capitalism. Indira Gandhi's decision to allow the inflow of foreign capital under the command of the state produced a regime of license-permit *raj*. Licenses to set up industrial units in the consumer luxury goods either in the form of joint ventures with foreign capital or with imported technology were dished out to those who had access to political power. In return, they were protected from any competition by the license permit-*raj* which allowed a virtual monopoly to the select few who managed to obtain the initial industrial license. The profits in the luxury consumer goods sector were enormous. This sector made instant billionaires and so had a huge attraction for the 'entrepreneurs' in the private sector. The licenses were obtained by massive bribes paid to Congress party bosses and government bureaucrats. The spin-off effect of this mentality of windfall profits was the surge in what came to be known as the underworld economy. The massive growth in the underworld economy gave birth to a new breed of entrepreneurs and politicians who respected no limits in their drive to attain windfall profits. The drug and weapon smugglers, and the urban real estate manipulators hired armies of goons to protect their windfall profits. The massive amounts of money and muscle power at their disposal were made available to the party in power in return for favors such as police protection. In order to deal with the political enemies of Indira

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<sup>35</sup> Javeed Alam (1982). op. cit., p. 1144.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1145.

Gandhi, politicians were recruited not only from the subaltern class but also from the lumpen elements "who were willing to go to any length to drag on voters, systematically replacing discursive techniques with money and subtle forms of coercion."<sup>37</sup> Recruits for the Congress fronts like the *Seva Dal*, the National Students Union, and the Youth Congress were drawn from the underworld. Thus, according to one observer, the party organization "became an alliance of *Khadi*-clad dandies at the top and underworld criminals at the bottom."<sup>38</sup> The process of criminal-political nexus that began under Indira Gandhi's rule reached such proportions that in the early 1990s the government had to appoint a committee- the Vohra Committee- to investigate such nexus. The report was so damaging for the Congress party in particular that only a brief summary of the report was presented to the parliament. The government's own agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), admitted in its submission to the Vohra Committee that the criminals were not only funding the politicians but many had entered politics to safeguard their interests. The Director of the CBI stated that:

An organized crime syndicate/mafia generally commences its activities by indulging in petty crime at local level....In port towns, their activities involve smuggling and sale of imported goods and progressively graduate to narcotics and drug trafficking. In the bigger cities, the main source of income relates to real estate- forcibly occupying lands/buildings....Over time, the money power thus acquired is used for building up contacts with bureaucrats and politicians and expansion of activity with impunity. The money power is used to develop a network of muscle-power which is also used by the politicians during elections.<sup>39</sup>

The Intelligence Bureau (IB), in its report to the Vohra Committee, added that:

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Sumanta Banerjee (1984). Indira Gandhi: Contradictions with a Purpose. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (48): 2030.

<sup>39</sup> Vohra Committee Report (1995). *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 41 (3): 641.

The cost of contesting elections has thrown the politician into the lap of the criminal elements....There has been a rapid spread and growth of criminal gangs, armed *senas*, drug mafias, smuggling gangs, drug peddlers and economic lobbies in the country which have, over the years, developed an extensive network of contacts with the bureaucrats/Government functionaries....Some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs/armed *senas* and, over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, State Assemblies and the national Parliament. Resultantly, such elements have acquired considerable political clout seriously jeopardizing the smooth functioning of the administration and the safety of life and property of the common man, causing a sense of despair and alienation among the people.<sup>40</sup>

As the underworld moved into the sphere of public life, the level of corruption among the bureaucracy and the politicians grew enormously. The circulation of what has come to be known as the "black money" was more than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.<sup>41</sup> The seriousness of corruption was also noted by Indira Gandhi herself in a public forum when she stated that "increasing corruption at various levels, not only of the bureaucracy and of political life but also in trade and commerce was a matter of major concern; that there was a feeling amongst the people that persons known to be corrupt escaped the clutches of the law because of their possession and influence while the small fry are caught in the net."<sup>42</sup> The Congress President, D. Sanjivaiyya, was more honest than her when he pointed his finger at his fellow Congressmen. He complained publicly that "Congressmen who were paupers in 1947 had become millionaires and multi-millionaires and own palatial buildings and factories...without having any ostensible source of income."<sup>43</sup> Charges of corruption were leveled at Congressmen even during Nehru's times. A Commission was established to study the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 642.

<sup>41</sup> Dolly Arora (1995). On the Tragedy of Public Domain: Corruption, Victimization and the New Policy Regime. *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 41 (3): 385.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in L.P. Singh (1995). Morality in Public Affairs. *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 41 (3): 619.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 620.



charges of corruption against the Congress Chief Minister of Punjab, Partap Singh Kairon. While the Commission absolved Kairon of any direct wrongdoing, it stated that his sons and other family members had taken undue advantage of his position as the Chief Minister of Punjab in obtaining certain properties and licenses for development. These charges, however, were minor when considering the scale of corruption during Mrs. Gandhi's regime which had become simple looting.

The state's decision to allow the flow of foreign capital under its direction became another source of corruption and influence peddling. As the legal funding of political parties virtually stopped after the amendments in 1970 to the Elections Act by Mrs. Gandhi, the only way the business could contribute to the coffers of political parties was through huge cash payments, which remained unaccounted. It is here that the control over licensing became handy as permits were now issued to the highest bidders. Thus, the "party in power, by virtue of its control over permits, licenses and import controls, had access to enormous slush funds not available to others."<sup>44</sup> As it came to depend upon the permit-*raj*, the corporate sector not only contributed richly to the Congress party but in some cases it was also subjected to "virtual extortion by the Congress and its auxiliary Youth Congress."<sup>45</sup> The layer of bureaucracy, which came in the form of inspector-*raj*, only added more to the unabashed thuggery.

The deployment of goon squads in the political sphere was not the sole domain of the Congress; the other parties also mobilized forces from the underworld. As the clashes between rival factions of the ruling classes continued, Indira Gandhi declared a state of Emergency on June 25, 1975. The government gave two reasons for the state of emergency: (i) that there was a threat to India's national unity and integrity; and (ii) that

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<sup>44</sup> R.B. Jain (1995). Regulating Political Finance in India. *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 41 (4): 705.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 704.

rampant inflation had to be brought under control.<sup>46</sup> Opposition leaders were arrested and severe censorship imposed on the press. Though the leaders of the *Akali Dal* were not arrested, their decision to oppose the emergency landed them in jails. Chief Minister Giani Zail Singh had a free hand in arresting the leftist leaders of various student and workers organizations. The activists of the Youth Congress were able to rough-up any political opponent of the Congress with the active support of the authorities, including the police. The leader of the Youth Congress, Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's younger son, provided political support to the army of the criminal underworld in the services of the Congress party. He was also at the forefront of such measures as "beautification" and sterilization.<sup>47</sup> Certain sections of the cities populated by the weaker sections were demolished to "beautify" the neighborhoods, and, since the population control topped the agenda, the people, especially the poor, were sterilized, often through naked force.

The emergency was lifted after nineteen months and parliamentary elections took place in March 1977. The Congress suffered a humiliating defeat, securing only 28.4 per cent of the seats with a popular support of just 34.5 per cent of the votes in parliament.<sup>48</sup> A new coalition of the rural and the urban rich formed the government under the banner of the *Janata* party. The Akali Dal became a coalition partner in this Kulaks-led anti-Congress grouping. It was able to get the important portfolio of agriculture. This Kulaks-dominated government demanded an immediate ousting of the state governments that did not enjoy the support of the dominant agrarian interests. The elections for these state assemblies were not due for some time. The only tool at its disposal was Article 356 to

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<sup>46</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj (1986). op. cit., p. 1704.

<sup>47</sup> A party insider described Sanjay Gandhi as "a Doon school Columbus product, a some time Rolls Royce apprentice in London, utterly unacademic, totally non-intellectual, and in the public mind a reckless gadfly with a penchant for girls and passion for cars." Uma Vasudev (1977). *Two Faces of Indira Gandhi*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, pp. 103-104.

<sup>48</sup> P.M. Kamnath (1993). op. cit., p. 18.

dismiss these state governments before their terms expired. While in opposition, the coalition partners of Janata government had often criticized the Congress for dismissing duly elected state assemblies for political reasons. After taking oath, however, the *Janata* government dismissed nine state governments ruled by the Congress declaring that in the face of people's verdict in the parliamentary elections, the Congress party's rule was not legitimate. The Akali Dal, as a coalition partner, did not raise the issue of either putting an end to the practice of arbitrary dismissals of the state governments or the issue of centralization of power in general. It only showed that the clamor against centralization was a camouflage to hide the real interests of the Kulaks. Once in power at the center, the same class used all these "arbitrary" tools at its disposal to further its interests. All nine states dismissed under section 356 returned the Kulaks led parties in power. In Punjab, the old Akali-Jan Sangh coalition was re-incarnated in the new Akali-Janata coalition. Immediately after forming the coalition government, the Kulaks launched an assault on the Congress supported centers of power among the Sikhs. The first to suffer the blows of Kulaks wrath were the *Nirankaris*, a heterodox Sikh sect.

### **The Godmen**

On April 13, 1978, a group of orthodox Sikhs under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhinderawlae marched over to the sight of a *Nirankari* congregation with the purpose of stopping the preachers of the *Nirankari* faith. This march produced a violent clash in which more than a dozen people were killed. The Kulaks-controlled SGPC issued a *hukamnama* (edict) from the *Akal Takhat*, Amritsar, asking Sikhs not to have any association with the *Nirankaris*, who were declared anti-Sikh. The main reason given for this anti-*Nirankari* edict was that the *Nirankaris* believed in the concept of a human Guru while the Sikhs were instructed by the tenth Guru to only observe the holy book as their Guru for eternity. The real reason, however, lied in the struggle for power and resources. As the Kulaks established its firm grip on all the Sikh shrines and temples of

the Punjab through its control of the SGPC, various sects such as *Radha Swamy*, *Nirankaris* and other Godmen who resisted the monopoly of the SGPC over massive resources directed their appeals to the Sikhs from the subaltern classes. The "lower caste" Sikhs found that the Kulaks control over the Sikh temples not only left them outside of management and administration but also made them feel unwelcome. The SGPC focused entirely on celebrating the "heroic" tradition of the *Khalsa* which was associated with the battles fought by the Sikh landed interests. The anti-caste and anti-oppression message of the Sikh Gurus and *sants* found no room in the preachings and the propaganda of the SGPC.<sup>49</sup> The heterodox sects moved to fill the void. Banerjee observed that:

Sikh religious institutions have become identified with the powerful *Jat* landlords and rich farmers. Those belonging to the lower castes in the community, and who are also the poorest, have been moving towards reformist sects like the *Nirankaris* or the *Radha Swamies* which promise them a status of equality.<sup>50</sup>

The appeal of these rival religious groups within Sikhism, however, was not limited to the "lower caste" Sikhs. They also recruited the poorer sections of both upper caste Sikhs and Hindus. The preachings of the *Radha Swamy*, *Nirankari* and other *sants* from various *deras*, with the exception of some orthodox *deras* like the Damdami Taksal, focused on Sikhism's more egalitarian and non-sectarian aspects. Such sermons do not serve well the aims of the Kulaks who worked tirelessly to unite all the Sikhs under their command to settle political scores with their rivals. The presence of such diverse centers of powers within Sikhism gave an opportunity to the Congress to weaken the Kulaks controlled Akali Dal and the SGPC. The Congress party established close

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<sup>49</sup> Important dates associated with the births and deaths of "lower caste" Sikh historical figures like Baba Ram Singh were never celebrated. Throughout Punjab, only the untouchable Sikhs celebrate the birthday of Ravidas, a celebrated *Sant* whose compositions are included in the Sikh holy book.

<sup>50</sup> Sumanta Banerjee (1984). Punjab: The Best Lack all Conviction, While the Worst are Full of Passionate Intensity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (27): 1020.

connections with the power groups of various heterodox sects to build political opposition to the Kulaks. In pursuit of this strategy, Giani Zail Singh outperformed the Akalis in symbolic politics by mobilizing religious and patriotic support for the Congress party.

While the police brutalities against leftist forces continued, Giani's government brought the ashes of a freedom fighter, Udham Singh, from Britain where he was hanged for killing a British governor whose administration was responsible for the massacre at *Jalian Wala Bagh* in Amritsar in 1919. At the same time, the mother of another popular martyr, *Shaheed* Bhagat Singh, was bestowed with the honor of *Punjab Mata* (Mother of Punjab). An *Akali* government in 1969 began a 640 kilometer road to join the Anandpur Sahib<sup>51</sup>, Damadama Sahib and eighty-nine places along the way, all of them associated with the exploits of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. Upon its completion in 1973, Giani exploited it cleverly. The Chief Minister led "a three-day procession which involved four army and police bands, 1000 trucks and buses, 5000 cars, a fly-past by three planes and flower-bedecked buses and trucks bearing the *Guru Granth Sahib* and sacred relics of Guru Gobind Singh."<sup>52</sup> A political analyst noted that "it is a well known fact that the state under his (Giani Zail Singh- S.P) leadership had spent considerable resources in using the religious-political traditions of not only the Sikhs but also of the Hindus and other sects. He did so to weaken the *Akali's* grip on the religion based politics."<sup>53</sup>

The Godmen who established their religious *deras* did not confine their activities to the domain of spirituality. They became important influence peddlers with strong political connections and power bases. In many instances, they settled various factional feuds among politicians.<sup>54</sup> When the April 1978 clash occurred between rival Sikh

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<sup>51</sup> The place associated with the birth of *Khalsa* in 1699.

<sup>52</sup> Robin Jeffrey (1994). *What's Happening to India?: Punjab, Ethnic Conflict and the Test for Federalism*. Second Edition, London: MacMillan, pp. 91-92.

<sup>53</sup> Rashpal Malhotra (1984). Foreword, in Parmod Kumar, et al. op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> During my research visit, I had to the opportunity to visit the *dera* of Baba Waryam

factions in Amritsar, it became apparent that both sides were heavily armed. In fact, all Godmen are always surrounded by heavily armed men. The political patronage they enjoyed saved them from any harassment by the police for legal or illegal weapon collection. The police and civil officers also used the service of these Babas to secure political backing. The former chief of Punjab police Bhinder was a close friend of Bhindrawale, the leader of the Damdami Taksal. The *dera* of Bhinderawale was a known hotbed of the orthodox Sikhs, who were armed to the teeth. Its location near the Pakistani border made it easier for Bhinderawale to acquire smuggled weapons. The border states of Punjab witnessed the establishment of "narco-terrorism networks" which were involved in "narcotics, drugs and weapon smuggling."<sup>55</sup> Among the border states, the state of Punjab was clearly a leading contender in "narco-terrorism networks." The "human carriers" of these networks almost always came from the marginalised strata of society. The Punjab had witnessed the rising incomes of a small minority and the falling fortunes of a vast majority of the ruralites as a result of the capitalistic transition in agriculture. Neither the populism of the Congress nor the *Akalis* was able to stop the trend toward landlessness and poverty. In the absence of a large industrial base, the poorly-educated landless Sikh youth were attracted to the life of immediate riches. When the floodgates of orthodoxy opened, it was this lumpen stratum that came to form the nucleus of the militant movement.<sup>56</sup> The appeals of Bhindrawale to Sikh youth to bear

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Singh in Ratwara, near Chandigarh. A faction of the Punjab Pradesh Congress leadership, which was attempting to oust both the party president and the chief minister, sat in the company of this spiritual leader. The Baba was known to have close associations with Manmohan Singh and Narsimha Rao. A few weeks later, both the president and the chief minister were replaced by the Congress high command. Exactly what role the Baba played may not be known, but one of his ardent disciples, Santokh Singh Randhawa, whom I had met at Baba's abode, became the party president.

<sup>55</sup> Vohra Committee Report (1993). *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*. 41 (3): 642.

<sup>56</sup> The Government White Paper noted the involvement of "criminals, smugglers and other anti-social" elements in the separatist movement. see White Paper on Punjab

arms and carry out direct actions to eliminate the enemies of the *Panth* not only appealed to the lumpen elements but also legitimized their life-style and gave them a purpose. Thus, it is not surprising that the culture of extortion and terror accompanied Sikh militancy throughout its tenure. In fact, it reached new barbaric heights as the movement, which launched a *dharm yudh morcha* (agitation to protect religion), grew stronger.

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Agitation, in Abida Samiuddin (1985). op. cit., p. 190.

## Chapter 7

### The Political Economy of the *Dharm Yudh*

Once the Akali Dal formed its own government in coalition with the Janata Party in the Punjab and became a coalition partner at the Center, the Kulaks launched frontal attacks against the rival centers of power. The Congress had carefully developed a close alliance with heterodox sects like the *Radha Swamy* and the *Nirankaris* to counter the influence of Kulaks control over the Sikh temples and shrines through the SGPC. The Kulaks mobilized the forces of orthodoxy under the command of Jarnail Singh Bhinderawale to eliminate the influence of the *Nirankaris*, who had made successful headways in the countryside. Political instability in the state, what the central government referred to as 'law and order problem', and the divisions among the coalition partners of the Akali-Janata coalition caused by the activities of Bhinderawale in 1978-80 period, gave grounds to the newly elected Congress government of Indira Gandhi to dismiss the Punjab government.<sup>1</sup> For the Kulaks, the loss of the executive power came at a time when the green revolution had run out of momentum. As a result of the lackluster performance of the agricultural sector, Kulaks frustration increased. Politically unable to meet the challenge of the industrial bourgeoisie, both at center and state levels, the Kulaks adopted increasingly religious postures to push their agenda. The demands put forward through the medium of *dharm yudh morcha* (agitation to protect religion) showed that the concerns of the capitalist farmers of the Punjab dominated the political agenda.

The decision to launch *dharm yudh morcha* received enthusiastic support from the Sikh emigres living in the Western countries, particularly the United States, Canada

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<sup>1</sup> In the subsequent elections to the Punjab legislature, the defeat of the Akalis and the victory of the Congress pointed out that the decision of Indira Gandhi to sack the Akali-Janata coalition was not unpopular.



and Britain. Most of the Sikh emigres belong to the caste of the *Jatt* Sikhs and have strong social connections with the Kulak of the Punjab<sup>2</sup>. Along with a section of the Kulak, under the leadership of Akali "radicals" like Jagdev Singh Talwandi and Sukhjinder Singh, many emigre Sikh organizations pushed the agenda for an independent state of *Khalistan*. During the *dharma yudh morcha*, however, almost all the emigre Sikh organizations supported the Akali agitation based on the demands of the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution (ASR). They were instrumental in garnering the support of the U.S. right wing and internationalization of the Punjab problem. U.S. capital has not shown any open desire to support the partitioning of India, but it did strive to bring India closer to its position in foreign policy and to force open the doors of Indian domestic market to U.S. capital by taking full advantage of the political instability caused by the Punjab or Kashmir problems. It gave the Indian government an excuse to portray the internal problems as "externally inspired."

The Punjab problem resulted from the ongoing struggle between the Kulaks and industrial bourgeoisie. Politically outmaneuvered by the industrial bourgeoisie, a section of the Kulaks also sympathized with the idea of a separate state<sup>3</sup>. However, the dominant faction of the Kulaks led by Parkash Singh Badal's Akali Dal was hopeful of a negotiated settlement for a decentralized federal state, which would continue to guarantee access to the Indian market. The Kulaks mobilized all its political resources including the All India Sikh Students Federation, the Akali Dal's Youth Wing and the SGPC to press for the acceptance of the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution in its entirety. The Kulaks were able to bring Bhinderwale and his associates under their umbrella. The chaos and anarchy

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<sup>2</sup> Almost all of the Khalistani protagonists in the Western countries hail from a Kulak background. Men like Ganga Singh Dhillon, Gurmit Singh Aulakh, Didar Singh Bains, Jagjit Singh Chohan, Talwinder Singh Parmar, Gian Singh Sandhu, and Tarsem Singh Purewal are all *Jatt* Sikhs whose families and relatives belong to the class of the capitalist farmers.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 8.

created by the *dharm yudh morcha* came to a violent end as the central government decided to use the Indian Armed Forces to put an end to the activities of the "religious warriors" who were hiding in the Golden Temple. Codenamed "Bluestar", the army operation of June 1984 was a political statement from the Indian bourgeoisie that it was willing to use all the might of the state to protect its interests. Since independence, the bourgeois republic has tolerated no threat to its existence, either from the left or from the right.<sup>4</sup> This did not, however, mean that the bourgeoisie was unwilling to negotiate a settlement with the Kulaks. The subsequent negotiations, which resulted in the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal pact, only proved that the industrial bourgeoisie was pursuing a double-edged strategy.

The studies dealing with the rise of "Sikh fundamentalism" after the *Nirankari* episode of 1978 have focused heavily on the exploits of Jarnail Singh Bhinderawale. A thesis is advanced that the Congress party under the leadership of Giani Zail Singh used Bhinderawale firstly to weaken the power base of the Akalis both in secular and religious domains and then to corner his rivals in the Punjab Pradesh Congress party.<sup>5</sup> The overwhelming focus on the activities of Bhinderawale has ignored the makings of the

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting example of how the Indian bourgeoisie viewed its own struggle against colonial capital as patriotic while any domestic opposition to its rule is considered a threat to the national 'unity and integrity' comes from the south Indian state of Kerala. A demand was raised by the Communists that Punnappa-Vayalar uprising of 1946 led by the Communist Party against the then Maharaja of Travancore be officially recognized as part of the freedom struggle. The state Congress government appointed a committee, the A.P. Udayabhanu committee, in 1986 which concluded "that the villages rose against their social and economic backwardness and that it occurred after the Provisional Government under Nehru assumed charge." Therefore, it can not be recognized as a part of the freedom movement because essentially it was against the Indian state. See, *India Today*, November 17, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> See Mark Tully and Satish Jacob (1985). *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*. London: Pan Books, and Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh (1984). *Tragedy of the Punjab: Operation Bluestar and After*. New Delhi: Vision. For an account of Bhinderawale's political activities linked with the CIA inspired conspiracies among the emigre Sikhs, see Chand Joshi (1984). *Bhinderawale: Myth and Reality*. New Delhi: Vikas.

criminal-political nexus of the 1970s that resulted in the increasing use of goons and godmen by both the Kulaks led parties and the industrial bourgeoisie to settle political scores. The phenomenon of mass unemployed youth who filled the ranks of the militant organizations has also attracted the attention of academics. Focusing on the lack of industrial base in the Punjab economy, Telford has argued that a surplus educated population in a shrinking economy of the Punjab has contributed to the rise in fundamentalism among the Sikh youth.<sup>6</sup> According to Khushwant Singh, the economic opportunities could not catch up with the rising population and expectations of "the educated unemployed Sikh youth who became pliable material in the hands of Marxists or Sikh fundamentalists."<sup>7</sup> Subsequent studies focusing on the militant movement of the Sikhs pointed out that the basic premise of the thesis of "mass educated unemployed Sikh youth" was, in fact, wrong. These studies have shown that the militant Sikh movement attracted the attention of the illiterate and semi-illiterate landless and marginalized strata of the Sikh youth<sup>8</sup>. The educated youth came mainly from the families of the rural and the urban rich. Even if they were unemployed, educated youth could fall on family resources. It was the uneducated youth of marginal and landless rural families who bore the brunt of the economic crisis. The Akali Dal's youth wing and

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<sup>6</sup> Hamish Telford (1992). The Political Economy of the Punjab: Creating Space for Sikh Militancy. *Asian Survey*, 32 (11): 969-87.

<sup>7</sup> Khushwant Singh (1985). The Genesis. in Abida Samiuddin, p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> Sandhu states that most of the leaders and cadre of the militants came from the marginal peasantry. See Devinder Pal Sandhu (1992). *Sikhs in Indian Politics: Study of a Minority*. New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, pp. 127-128. Jeffrey point out that the extremists were largely young men under 30 years old, rural *Jatts* from non-too-prosperous families. Few non-*Jatts* were also attracted to Bhindrawale. See Robin Jeffrey (1994). *What's Happening to India?: Punjab, Ethnic Conflict and the Test for Federalism*. Second Edition, London: MacMillan, p. 175. A post-militancy study described the Sikh terrorists as: (i) mostly under the age of 25; (ii) predominantly *Jatt* Sikhs; (iii) with minor exceptions, mostly school drop-outs, or totally illiterate; and (iv) mostly *Jatt* boys from families with half-acre to 4 acres of land. Harish K. Puri, Parmjit S. Judge, and Jagroop S. Sekhon (1996). *Terrorism in Punjab: Certain Preliminary Observations on the Basis of Field Investigation*. (Typescript)

Bhinderawale's militant outfits recruited this strata to do the political bidding of their masters.

### **The Rise of Bhinderawale**

Bhinderawale typified the section of small and landless peasantry, those who were divorced from the means of production by the process of primitive accumulation<sup>9</sup>. A grade five drop-out from a marginal *Jatt* Sikh family of *Malwa* region, he grew up at the *dera* of an orthodox preacher<sup>10</sup>, Gurbachan Singh of village Bhinder, hence the suffix Bhindrawale, in the border district of Ferozepur- a hotbed of cross-border smuggling activity. When Gurbachan Singh died in 1977, Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale, who was appointed as the head of the *dera* a year earlier, became the unchallenged leader of this bastion of orthodoxy. Though the Kulaks-controlled SGPC did not like the individually owned *deras* of any godmen, it was able to exploit the rivalry between these parallel centers of power. After assuming leadership of the *dera*, Bhinderawale toured the state in his crusade to baptize the Sikhs. He "made the deepest inroads" among the Sikhs of subaltern classes "by popularizing baptism" and directing his religious message against castism.<sup>11</sup> It was during this tour that he found that the *Nirankaris* had developed a considerable following among the weaker sections of the rural society. The *Nirankaris* also emphasized the anti-caste message of Sikhism but refused to indulge in such rituals as baptism. The message of the *Nirankaris* was not only aimed at the subaltern class

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<sup>9</sup> Between 1961 and 1971, the numbers of landless in Punjab had risen from 17 percent to more than 32 percent. As the concentration of land continued, the operational holdings declined by further 25.3 per cent between 1971 and 1981. Of these, marginal holdings declined by 61.9 per cent and small holdings declined by 23.3 per cent. See Sucha Singh Gill (1988). Contradictions of Punjab Model of Growth and Search for an Alternative. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (42): 2167-68.

<sup>10</sup> The youngest of seven sons, his family "donated" him to the *dera*.

<sup>11</sup> Pritam Singh (1987). Two Facets of Revivalism: A Defense. in *Punjab Today*. Edited by Gopal Singh, New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, pp. 170-171.

but also did not make any distinction between Hindus and Sikhs. In order to challenge the popularity of the *Nirankaris*, Bhinderawale invoked the old strategy of the Sikh reformers that Hinduism was trying to absorb Sikhism into its fold. The non-orthodox traditions of the *Nirankaris* and the *Radha Swamies* became targets of Bhinderawale's anti-Hindu tirades. The Kulak found a natural ally that was willing to eliminate the rival centers of power.

After the bloody incident of April 1978 in which 12 orthodox Sikhs and 3 *Nirankaris* died, the Kulaks came to the defense of Bhinderawale with all their might. The Kulaks-controlled SGPC issued a *hukamnama* (religious edict) from the *Akal Takhat* asking Sikhs not to have any social interaction with the *Nirankaris*. From the fear of further attacks against the *Nirankaris*, the central government moved the venue of the *Nirankari* murder trial to Haryana. Bhinderawale pressured the Akali government of Punjab to protest against these moves of the center where the Akalis were in coalition. The Kulaks protested against these moves but they were not willing to walk out of the coalition which would have survived without their support<sup>12</sup>. The presence of the industrial bourgeoisie in the coalition also meant that the *Nirankaris* were not without powerful allies. Under constant attack in the Punjab, the *Nirankaris* became more active in areas outside the Punjab, particularly in Haryana and Delhi. This gave further ammunition to Bhinderawale's anti-Hindu crusade.

Declaring that the Sikhs were slaves in India, Bhindrawale asked the Sikhs to prepare for a war of independence. He asked the Sikh youth to "buy motorcycles and guns" as "a Sikh without arms is naked."<sup>13</sup> He ordered that "every Sikh boy should keep 200 grenades with him." Further, "there is a need to raise motorcycle-groups in order to

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<sup>12</sup> The agriculture ministry dear to the heart of the Kulak was in the hands of the Akalis.

<sup>13</sup> Excerpts From the Statements of Shri Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. in Abida Samiuddin, ed. *The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 696.

take revenge against perpetrators of crimes against the Sikhs."<sup>14</sup> These perpetrators, according to Bhindrawale, were Hindus. Though they far outnumbered the Sikhs in India, but, according to Bhindrawale's simple arithmetic, every Sikh gets 35 Hindus, "not even 36."<sup>15</sup> He failed to understand the reverse impact of these figures. His calls to bear arms and action attracted "youngmen from villages- economic misfits too lazy to dig and too proud to beg...and plain criminals like smugglers, drug traffickers and other types of law breakers."<sup>16</sup> He started dispatching armed gangs to settle disputes, carry out actions against targeted enemies, and silence his critics. In a spate of violence that followed, a number of prominent *Nirankaris*, including their leader Baba Gurbachan Singh<sup>17</sup>, Hindu leaders like Lala Jagat Narain and his son Ramesh Chander<sup>18</sup>, and a number of police officers, including a Deputy-Inspector General, were killed. Though Bhindrawale's hands were suspected in many of the killings, no charges were laid against him. It is suggested that his close association with Congress stalwarts like Giani Zail Singh kept him out of the reach of the law enforcement agencies.<sup>19</sup> Whether Giani's support protected him

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 695.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Anup Chand Kapur (1985). *The Punjab Crisis: An Analytical Study*. New Delhi: S. Chand and Company, p. 246.

<sup>17</sup> The Kulaks were so pleased with the murder of the *Nirankari* Baba that they awarded the confessed killer, Ranjit Singh, with the appointment of the *Jathedar* of the *Akal Takhat*, the highest temporal authority of Sikhism, while he was still in jail. Upon his release on bail in 1996, Ranjit Singh assumed the seat and refused to surrender to the police once his bail was canceled in October 1997. Through enormous pressure from the Kulaks led Punjab government of Parkash Singh Badal, the President of India gave him clemency for the murder after the current chief of the *Nirankaris* declared that he has forgiven Ranjit Singh.

<sup>18</sup> The owner of *Hind smachar* newspapers from Jalandhar, Lala Jagat Narain played a leading role in whipping up Hindu communalism in the post-independence Punjab. He spearheaded the Punjabi Hindu movement against the Punjabi language and the linguistic re-organization of the Punjab. His mentor Gulzari Lal Nanda became the main lobbyist for the Arya Smaji Hindus of the Punjab in the central leadership of the Congress party.

<sup>19</sup> Giani's association with other militant Sikh organizations is also documented. Following the *Nirankari* massacre, for example, a new organization called the *Dal Khalsa* was formed on April 20, 1978. The inaugural meeting of this militant outfit was

from the police is debatable, but the Kulak leadership of the Akali Dal made its support for Bhinderawale public. When he was finally arrested, it was the Akali leadership that launched agitations to secure his release. The activities of Bhinderawale, the *Nirankari* episode and subsequent killings, had largely served the interests of the Kulaks. He received the necessary backing of the Kulaks through the offices of the SGPC and the Akali Dal's youth fronts: the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and the Akali Youth Wing. The studies that have focused on the Congress conspiracies to bolster the image of Bhinderawale as a counter force to the Akalis have failed to understand the class nature of Bhinderawale's message. The issue of use or misuse of certain militant Sikh factions is more complicated than the apparent Congress conspiracy.

Bhinderawale's attacks on the *Nirankaris*, the leftists and the representatives of the Hindu urban petty bourgeoisie only served the political agenda of the Kulaks. Despite state oppression during the Congress and the Akali-Janata governments, the leftist forces had a strong presence among the poor and the intelligentsia. The membership of the Kulaks-controlled AISSF mushroomed from a mere 10,000 before Amrik Singh, a close associate of Bhinderawale, took over its leadership to over 100,000<sup>20</sup>. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the AISSF was a non-force in the Punjab student movement dominated by the Communist controlled student unions.<sup>21</sup> Beginning with the murder of a leftist student leader, Pirthipal Singh Randhawa, by the activists of the AISSF in July 1979, the leftist forces came under brutal attack as the Sikh militant movement grew. Although in alliance with a faction of the Communist Party (CPM)<sup>22</sup>, the Kulaks despised the strong

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held in the Aroma Hotel in Amritsar and, according to the Hotel staff, the bill of Rs. 600 was paid by Giani Zail Singh. See Mark Tully and Satish Jacob (1985). *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*. London: Pan Books, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> Hamish Telford (1992). op. cit., p. 982.

<sup>21</sup> S.L. Sharma (1981). *Student Politics in Punjab: Socio-Regional Dimensions*. cited in Hamish Telford (1992), p. 982.

<sup>22</sup> The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was an electoral ally of the Akali-Janata coalition and supported the government from outside. "It was wrong to rely on their

presence of the leftists in the countryside, in particular among the weaker sections. The Communist Party of India's election alliance in the early 1970s exerted a strong pressure on the Giani Zail Singh's government to lower land ceilings to 17.5 acres and eliminate all the loopholes. Earlier, the Communist party had played a leading role in the tenants' movement of the 1950s<sup>23</sup>. In addition, the Communist controlled *Khet Mazdoor Sabha* (Farm Workers Union) had launched various struggles against the Kulaks in the countryside. Harsh measures were adopted by the Kulaks to eliminate the Communists. The beatings and harassment of the Communists cadres and their family members in the countryside was a matter of routine. The fake police encounters that reached their zenith in the late 1980s had actually begun under the Kulak government of Parkash Singh Badal to eliminate the leftist *Nixalbari* movement. The Bhinderwale brigades intensified the attacks on the leftists as, according to an editor of a Communist daily, *Nawan Jamana*, the Communists launched agitations "to fight religious fundamentalism"<sup>24</sup>. Bhinderawale

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support," according to the secretary-general of the Akali Dal, Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa. As transport minister in the coalition, Dhindsa tried to privatize the publicly owned bus services of the state. The Kulak interests owned the entire private bus services which constituted about 40 per cent of the total bus service routes in the state. The Kulaks led government initiated moves to privatize the entire bus service in the state to give all routes to the private transporters. The move was vigorously opposed by the CPI (M). According to Dhindsa, the transport workers union, which was affiliated with the Communists, scuttled his plan for privatization. (Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa. Personal Interview. July 23, 1996)

<sup>23</sup> In 1957, the Communist Party, which had a strong presence in the countryside, received almost 14 percent of the popular vote in the elections to the state legislature. The Akali Dal, on the other hand, had only received 12 per cent in 1962 elections (in 1957 the Akali Dal had merged with the Congress). Since the creation of the new state, the Akali Dal's share of the popular votes has ranged around the 30 per cent mark while both factions of the Communist party have secured around 10 per cent of the polled votes. Although the party of the Kulak has significantly large presence in the countryside, the Communist parties also have a sizable presence, enough to give major headaches to the Kulak. Election data cited in Robin Jeffrey (1994). *What's Happening to India?: Punjab, Ethnic Conflict, and the Test for Federalism*. Second Edition, London: MacMillan, pp. 112-113.

<sup>24</sup> Jagjit Singh Anand (1990). *Punjab: Perceptions and Precepts*. Chandigarh: Twenty-



was not only useful to eliminate the adversaries of the Kulaks but he wholeheartedly supported their demands as formulated in the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution. Bhinderawale clearly stated that as far as he was concerned, he wanted "all the demands of the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution accepted."<sup>25</sup> In order to achieve those demands, he participated in the Kulaks led *dharm yudh morcha*. The Kulaks were not only pleased with his actions against the *Nirankaris* and the leftists, but they also benefited from his ideological propaganda which strengthened an anti-Hindu Sikh identity, an important weapon in the arsenal of ideological propaganda of the Kulaks. Despite his usefulness, the Kulaks were extremely reluctant to let loose a cannon like Bhinderawale to occupy the places of Sikh religious power. This much was clear from the 1979 SGPC elections in which the Akalis refused to accommodate Bhinderawale's candidates. When he decided to field his own candidates against the Akali Dal, Congress stalwarts like Giani Zail Singh and Ragunanadan Bhatia lent their support to Bhinderwale. All but a couple of his candidates from Amritsar lost to the Akali candidates. Bhinderawale returned favor to his backers by supporting a number of Congress candidates during the parliamentary election of 1980.<sup>26</sup> However, political opposition to the Akalis in selected elections did not change the class nature of Bhinderawale's crusade. The Kulaks leadership of the Akali Dal was well aware of his role in mobilizing support for the *dharm yudh morcha*. When he was arrested for inciting violence, the Akalis were the first to demand his release. In fact, he was the main "crowd-puller" during the Akali agitations.

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First Century India Society, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> Excerpts From the Statements of Shri Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale, in Abida Samuiddin (1985), op. cit., p. 695.

<sup>26</sup> Two Congress candidates printed posters saying "Bhindrawale supports me." One of the candidate Bhindrawale openly supported was R.L. Bhatia, a Hindu from Amritsar, who was the President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Party. Another was the wife of the former Punjab police chief, Pritam Singh Bhinder. See Mark Tully and Satish Jacob (1985). op. cit., p. 61.

### ***Dharm Yudh Morcha***

The collapse of the Kulaks-led coalition at the center and the subsequent dismissal of the Akali-Janata government by Mrs. Gandhi in 1980 strengthened the political grip of the industrial bourgeoisie, particularly the luxury goods producers who had made fortunes during the 1970s permit-*raj*. The state regulated inflow of the foreign capital, which created joint ventures to produce consumer goods, operated in a protected environment free from competition. Once a permit for certain industry was secured through bribes and political connections, this sector of the capitalist economy brought windfall profits for its owners. In a short span of a decade and half, from the second half of the 1960s to early 1980s, mega-industrialists like Ambanis<sup>27</sup> emerged on the scene. When Indira Gandhi returned to power, this consumer led industrial sector pushed the industrial policy in the direction of the production of the luxury consumer goods. The demand for luxury goods came from the real beneficiaries of the post-independence capitalist development, the Kulaks and the urban rich. The Congress government of Indira Gandhi was now catering to these consumer-oriented "middle classes." The "economic policy of the new regime was largely driven by pent-up demand for consumer durable and luxury from this class."<sup>28</sup> The policy was based on the premise that the demand for goods and services of this relatively affluent sections of the population could provide "the impetus for the growth in the economy."<sup>29</sup> This was clearly a departure from the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79), which had emphasized that the "luxury sector" must not be allowed to grow fast. The new direction indicated not only the strength of

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<sup>27</sup> From a small turmeric trader in the 1960s, Ambani, the owner of Reliance corporation, has become the largest industrialist of India.

<sup>28</sup> Jayant Lele (1995). Saffronisation of Shiv Sena: Political Economy of City, State and Nation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 (25): 1524.

<sup>29</sup> Ranjit Sen (1988). The Green Revolution and Industrial Growth in India: A Tale of Two Paradoxes and a Half. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (16): 791.

the consumer industries but also the new pressures caused by international capital penetrating the emerging consumer markets.

As consumers, the Kulaks happily endorsed the new consumer-oriented industrial policy, but the production and marketing of luxury consumer goods benefited only the industrial bourgeoisie and the urban petty bourgeoisie. Central control over the industrial licensing had denied any opportunity for the agricultural capital to move into the sphere of luxury consumer production. Thus, this highly lucrative sector remained out of reach for Sikh capitalists. Once India achieved 'self-sufficiency' in food production in 1972, the central government began diverting funds to the industrial sector. From 1972, the terms of trade began shifting against agriculture and in favor of industry. By the late 1970s, the frustration of the Kulaks was apparent as agriculture in Punjab had reached a plateau. Apart from a surplus crop of potatoes in 1978-79, which had no buyers, the per hectare production remained stagnant during the period 1977-78 to 1981-82, even though the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides had increased by 75 per cent.<sup>30</sup> The cost of production rose more swiftly than the agricultural prices. As a result, investment in agriculture throughout the 1980s remained stagnant.<sup>31</sup>

On a per capita basis, the Punjab had the largest middle class of urban and rural rich than any other province, but the people living under the poverty line, particularly in the countryside, were equal to the national levels- almost 40 per cent. The reality of this poverty, combined with rising expectations, had created a volatile situation.

Bhinderawale had recruited a large number of the youth from this stratum through his fiery anti-Hindu propaganda. It helped to unite the Sikh masses under the leadership of the Kulaks against industrial bourgeoisie. Everything from the existing poverty<sup>32</sup> and the

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<sup>30</sup> Anup Chand Kapur (1985). op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>31</sup> Ashok Gulati and Anil Sharma (1995). Subsidy Syndrome in Indian Agriculture. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 (39): A-94.

<sup>32</sup> The data from the early 1980s show that more than 75 percent of all agricultural wealth, including land moveable assets, is in the hands of only 10 per cent of the rural

alleged discrimination against the state of the Punjab was blamed on "Hindu" rulers of India. In political rhetoric, the Akali leader Sant Longowal compared the position of Sikhs in India to the blacks in South Africa and charged that the government of India was trying to exterminate the Sikhs<sup>33</sup>. The political struggle of the Kulaks with the industrial bourgeoisie thus became a 'holy' war of the Sikhs against the domination of "Hindu rulers." In launching the *morcha* on September 7, 1981, the *Akali Dal* stated that the Sikhs have been forced to launch a holy war against the Indian government because "the ruling party has not only refused to fulfill its solemn promises made by it to them on the eve of independence, but also because ever since independence, it has consistently and deliberately tried to reduce them to the unenviable position of second class citizens."<sup>34</sup>

While the political rhetoric of discrimination against Sikhs remained a central feature of the *morcha*, the demands of the Akali Dal spoke volumes about the real nature of the struggle- the interests of the Kulak. On September 21, 1981, the Akali leaders presented a memorandum of 45 demands to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The Akali Dal protested against the central government's attempts to lower the quota of Sikhs in the Indian armed forces to make their numbers proportionate to their percentage in the population. The memorandum also protested against the nationalization of the Punjab and Sindh Bank controlled by the Sikh capitalists. It demanded the establishment of a "dry port" in Amritsar. While demanding more central aid to the state, the memorandum protested against the "economic exploitation of the Punjab." It protested against land ceilings in the agricultural sector and complained that no such ceiling applied to the

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households, while the poorest 70 per cent of the rural households possess less than 7 per cent of all assets. See Harish K. Puri (1985). Punjab: Elections and After. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (40): 1682.

<sup>33</sup> Bikash Chandra (1993). *Punjab Crisis: Perceptions and Perspectives of Indian Intelligentsia*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Rajinder Singh, General Secretary, Shiromani Akali Dal. "Why this Holy Way?" in Gopal Singh (1994). *Politics of Sikh Homeland (1940-1990)*. New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, Appendix IV, p. 159.

urban property. The Kulaks also demanded loans for farmers "at the rates given to the industrialists." While the memorandum protested against the rise in prices of industrial goods, it demanded higher prices for the agricultural produce. The Kulaks protested against the urban petty bourgeoisie's control over markets that were "procuring agricultural produce at cheap rates but selling the same to consumers at higher prices."<sup>35</sup>

The Kulaks also protested against the Congress party's attempts to support rival centers of power by demanding an end to intervention "in the Sikh tenants" and violations of "the sanctity of Sikh traditions." The memorandum demanded the enactment of an All India Gurdwaras Act and the recognition of the SGPC "as the sole representative institution of the Sikhs." In its present form, the Gurdwara Act only allows the SGPC to control the Sikhs shrines and temples of the Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The Kulaks' demand for the control of all the Sikh shrines of India has been vigorously opposed by the Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie settled in Delhi and other urban centers of India, including Patna and Mumbai. The Delhi *Gurdwara Prabandhik* Committee (DGPC) under the control of the Sikh petty bourgeoisie had vigorously opposed any moves to enact an All India Sikh Gurdwaras Act or declare SGPC as the sole representative body of the Sikhs. Fully aware of such opposition, the Kulaks included demands to win wider support among the Sikhs. It demanded the installation of a transmitter in the Golden temple to relay *gurbani*. It also demanded that Amritsar be declared a holy city, and a train to be named Golden Temple Express. The sharp edge of the ideological weapon of exclusionary Sikh identity was the demand of an amendment to article 25 (2) of the Indian constitution. The article deals with the Hindu civil code and reads that the word Hindu also includes Sikhs, Jains and Bodhis. The Akali Dal declared that this was clearly an attempt by the "Hindu" rulers of India to absorb Sikhism into the

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<sup>35</sup> See Grievances and Demands: List of 45 Demands Received From the Akali Dal by the Government in September, 1981. in Abbida Samiuddin (1985), Appendix V, pp. 688-691.

fold of Hinduism.<sup>36</sup> The Akali leaders threatened to burn the copies of Indian constitution if the article was not amended.

The Kulaks were also angered by Indira Gandhi's awards in river water disputes among the Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. The memorandum protested against the central "control of water head works (the *Bhakhra-Nangal* Board- S.P.) and the river water distribution." In the early 1970s, Indira Gandhi had awarded 8 million acre feet (MAF) of water to non-riparian Rajasthan while both the Punjab, a riparian state, and Haryana, a successor state, were awarded 3.5 MAF each. After coming to power in 1977, the Akali government of the Punjab challenged this award in the Supreme Court of India. The Congress government of Darbara Singh, elected in 1980, however, withdrew the case apparently under pressure from Indira Gandhi. In 1981, another water-sharing agreement was reached between the Chief Ministers of Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan. It was based on a new projection of 17.17 MAF of available water as against the previous estimate of 15.85 MAF. Punjab's share was increased to 4.22 MAF, Haryana's share remained at 3.50 MAF, and Rajasthan was to receive 8.60 MAF, while Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir received 0.20 MAF and 0.65 MAF respectively.<sup>37</sup> The Kulaks of the Punjab were clearly upset at the new distribution agreed by the Congress Chief Minister of the Punjab. Thus, they demanded that the water distribution must be negotiated directly with their political organization- the Akali Dal.

Indira Gandhi accepted the memorandum and asked the Akali leaders to come back for talks in October 1981. They were also asked to submit a more focused list of the demands. The Akali leaders came back with a condensed list of 15 demands. The release

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<sup>36</sup> Incidentally, the first opposition to article 25 had come from the Hindu *Jan Sangh* after the promulgation of the Indian constitution. The *Jan Sangh* had denounced "the Hindu Code Bill as inimical to Hindu *dharma*." See Madhu Limaye (1992). *Decline of a Political System: Indian Politics at the Crossroads*. Allahabad: Wheeler Publishing, p. 232.

<sup>37</sup> Parmod Kumar et al (1984). op. cit., p. 81.

of Bhinderawale, who was arrested in connection with a shoot-out in Amritsar, topped the list of the newly presented demands. As they had to condense their demands, the Akali leaders inserted the spirit of *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution by including a demand for a new decentralized federal system with center having control over only defense, foreign, communication and currency while the rest of the powers must be transferred to the states. Through this demand, the Akalis managed to keep the spirit of the newly reduced number of demands similar to the ones presented in the earlier memorandum of 45 demands.<sup>38</sup> The negotiations produced no settlement between the Akali Dal and Indira Gandhi. She was unwilling to accept the demands of agricultural capitalists against those of the industrial sector. In a clear bid to keep the Kulaks of the three states divided, she refused to change her award in the river-waters dispute. She showed her willingness to name a train after the Golden Temple and take necessary steps to amend article 25. A comprehensive deal on the basis of these demands would have meant a major victory of the Kulaks against the industrial bourgeoisie.

The Hindu petty bourgeoisie of the Punjab, which had come under attack from the Bhinderawale's youth brigades, opposed Kulaks attempts to challenge their monopoly over the markets. Politically loyal to Hindu *Jan Sangh* and its re-incarnation BJP, this *bazaari* bourgeoisie did not like the Congress party's political line of compromise between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie. Though BJP has championed the defense of the capital and has earned the trust of the industrial bourgeoisie, its presence among the Kulaks of all regions remains negligible<sup>39</sup>. The specific economic interests of

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<sup>38</sup> See Abida Samiuddin, pp. 690-691.

<sup>39</sup> It has joined the Kulak-led coalitions in the Punjab to safeguard its interests, but the Kulak's non-compromising attitude has made it a reluctant, often unreliable, coalition partner. The withdrawal of *Jan Sangh* from coalition led to downfall of the Parkash Singh Badal's first ministry in 1971. The political problems of the second coalition (1977-1980) gave Indira Gandhi an excuse to dismiss the Akali-Janata government. The present coalition, which came into power after February 1997 elections in Punjab, is already under strain over such issues as the abolition of octroi, a major demand of the

the Punjabi Hindu bazaari bourgeoisie have often clashed with the class of largely Sikh capitalist farmers. In order to keep its supremacy in the dividing house of the Kulak between the irrigation rich western Sikh farmers and the eastern Punjab's Hindu farmers, the urban petty bourgeoisie was at the forefront of anti-Punjabi suba agitation. Contrary to the advise of its national leadership, the Punjab unit of the *Jan Sangh* led a campaign among Punjabi Hindus to register their mother tongue as Hindi.<sup>40</sup> Bhinderawale used this history to attack Hindu organizations like the *Jan Sangh* and the RSS, who were labeled anti-Punjabi. The Hindu petty bourgeoisie, however, began creating its own militant organizations. Hindu associations such as the Hindu *Suraksha Samiti*, the Hindu *Shiv Sena*, the Hindu *Rashtrya Sangathan*, the *Brahmin Sabha* and the Hindu Front were organized in response to the militant Sikh organizations.<sup>41</sup> The involvement of Congress Hindu leaders of Punjab in these organizations and Hindu marches was overwhelming. A senior Congress (I) leader of the Punjab, Pandit Mohan Lal, called upon Hindu youth to join his organization to acquire necessary training in self-defense. In a press statement, he stated that he had "administered oath to 1,100 volunteers. They have pledged to sacrifice everything to protect the Hindu religion, the Hindu community and its property in Punjab."<sup>42</sup>

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urban petty bourgeoisie, and BJP's opposition to free electricity for farmers announced by the Badal government.

<sup>40</sup> Guru Golwarkar, leader of the RSS, toured the state of Punjab in 1960 asking Punjabi Hindus not to abandon their mother tongue- Punjabi. The national leadership of the *sangh privar* has propagated an inclusionary Hindu identity which embraces the Sikhs. At the founding convention of the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP), for example, Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader, represented the Sikhs. The convention defined the word Hindu "to mean 'one who respects, has faith in, and adheres to the principles of all those moral and spiritual lifestyles which have their origin in India'." The definition proposed that "Shaiva, Lingayat, Budhist, Jain, Sikh, Dadupanthi, Nanakpanthi, Ravidasi, Kabirpanthi, Arya Samaji, Brahmo and other cognate faiths were all part of the larger Hindus faith." See Ashish Nandy (1995). *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmbhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 88-89.

<sup>41</sup> Parmod Kumar, et al (1985). op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



The refusal of the central government to accede to any of its major demands, the bitter rivalry with the agrarian interests of Haryana and Rajasthan over the distribution of river water resources<sup>43</sup>, and the vehement opposition of the urban petty bourgeoisie to its political program, strengthened the resolve of the Kulaks to maintain and extend its hegemony over the Sikhs by invoking Sikhism. *Panth noo khatra hai* (the Sikh community is in danger) became the clarion call of the Kulaks to mobilize the Sikhs under its leadership. The tactics of the agitation changed from burning the constitution to *nehar roko* (stop the construction of Satluj-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal which was to take its share of the water to Haryana) to *rasta roko* (stop traffic) to protests at the venue of Asiad games, but Sikhism remained a vital part of its ideological arsenal. Kulak connections with Sikh emigres helped the agitation to gain international publicity. The debates on the Punjab problem in the U.S. legislatures were welcomed by the Kulaks as they became a vehicle to put diplomatic pressure on the central government to accept their demands.

Mostly concentrated in the United States, Canada and Britain, the Sikh emigres found a natural ally among the right wing of the United States in its fight against the Indian state. The right wing, led by Jesse Helms, found the Sikhs a useful ally in its struggle to force India to give up its independent foreign policy and leadership of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). The right wing was particularly agitated over India's stand on the question of Afghanistan. India had maintained that the Soviet troops entered Afghanistan upon the request of its legitimate government. Thus, any opposition to this agreement between the sovereigns of two nations amounted to direct interference in the

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<sup>43</sup> The Kulaks-led Bhajan Lal ministry came to the rescue of Indira Gandhi when it stopped the Akali Dal's march to Delhi during the Asian games. The Akali Dal had planned a series of demonstrations at the venue of Asian games to protest against the central government's "discriminatory policies against the Sikhs." Brutal force was used by the Haryana government to stop the passing of any Sikh going through Haryana during the games.

internal matters of Afghanistan. The victory of the military-industrial complex with the election of Ronald Reagan increased economic and political pressure on India to support the struggle of Western capital against the socialist bloc. While the right wing made use of its connections with such groups as the Sikhs in its arm-twisting efforts to force India in its orbit, the Indian government used the people's anti-imperialist sentiments to blame external interference for India's internal problem.

While the government *White Paper*, released after Operation Bluestar in Amritsar, only spoke about the "assistance from the external sources," India's influential weekly *India Today* accused the US of giving assistance to the Sikh separatist. It stated that "over the years Sikh extremists have forged ties with far right-wing Senator Jesse Helms who has a close relationship with the CIA and with General Danny Graham, former chief of the Defense Intelligence Agency who still wields considerable influence within the intelligence agencies."<sup>44</sup> The first time the US-Sikh relations caught the attention of Indian officials was in 1971 when Dr. Jagjit Singh Chohan, a former *Akali* minister, published a half page advertisement in the *New York Times*, October 11, 1971, pleading the case for *Khalistan*.<sup>45</sup> Chohan also said that he would set-up a parallel government in Nankana Sahib in Pakistan. As the emigre Sikh activists began establishing organizations such as the *Babar Khalsa* and *Khalistan Council*, Chohan, along with Ganga Singh Dhillon, a US citizen, began soliciting support for *Khalistan* from not only the Sikhs of Britain, Canada and the US, but also from the official circles. As the criticism of his activities grew in India, in 1984, the US refused to give visa to Chohan, who was a permanent resident in Britain.<sup>46</sup> However, Senator Jesse Helms found a way to circumvent this ban by inviting Chohan to testify before the U.S. Senate

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<sup>44</sup> Cited in V. Georgiev (1985). *India: A Milestone on the Path of Independence. International Affairs*, April 1985, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Anup Chand Kapur (1985). *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>46</sup> Satu P. Limaye (1993). *U.S.-Indian Relations: The Pursuit of Accommodation*. Boulder: Westview Press, p. 43.

Agriculture Committee.<sup>47</sup> During his May 1984 visit to India, vice-president Bush "apparently informed the Indian government that the CIA was not conspiring with Sikh terrorist against India. This marked one of only a few departures from US policy against confirming or denying reported CIA activities."<sup>48</sup>

The emphasis on external connections was deliberately highlighted by the Indian bourgeois press and the state to mask the internal causes of the problem. The *dharm yudh morcha* was firmly in the hands of the Kulaks of the Punjab. The Akali Dal and its auxiliary forces- AISSF and Bhinderwale brigades- created such a powerful challenge to the industrial bourgeoisie that Indira Gandhi was forced to dismiss a Congress government of the Punjab on October 6, 1983. The Punjab administration came under the direct control of the central government through the constitutional mechanism of the President's rule. The level of political violence continued to rise even after the declaration of the President's rule, which was imposed to restore "law and order" in the state<sup>49</sup>. What frustrated the attempts of the state to put down this violent agitation was the ability of the Sikh militants to strike at their targets and seek haven inside the premises of the Golden temple and other Sikh shrines. The Akali Dal facilitated the entry of Bhinderawale and his associates in the Golden Temple where he managed to occupy the *Akal Takhat*. He apparently felt unsafe in *Chowk Mehta* after police and para-military forces made a number of attempts to arrest the militants responsible for the ongoing violence in the state. Once Bhinderawale moved inside the holy shrine, the Kulaks militant brigades created havoc in the state through their murderous activities. As the

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<sup>47</sup> Arthur W. Helweg (1989). Sikh Politics in India: The Immigrant Factor. in N. Gerarld Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery, eds. *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and the Experience Beyond Punjab*. Delhi: Chankya Publications, p. 316.

<sup>48</sup> Satu P. Limaye (1993). op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> In the first five months of 1984, there were 775 incidents of political violence in which 298 people were killed and more than 525 injured. See White Paper on Punjab Agitation (1985). in Abida Samiuddin. op. cit., p. 207.

situation deteriorated, the state moved its armed forces to put an end to a direct challenge to its hegemony. According to the central government, the army was moved "to flush out the terrorists" from the Golden Temple who had a declared objective "of establishing an independent state for the Sikhs with external support."<sup>50</sup>

### **Operation Bluestar and After**

Code-named Bluestar, the Indian army launched a commando-style action against Sikh militants in the first week of June, 1984, when the Sikhs had come in great numbers to Amritsar to mark the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru<sup>51</sup>. The leader of the militant wing of the Kulaks, Jarnail Singh Bhinderawale, was killed in the action. With the exception of some Kulaks leaders like the former Prime Minister Chander Shekhar and the premier of Andhra Pradesh, N.T. Rama Rao, the army operation received unanimous support from all national political parties. The Operation Bluestar was followed by another army action, code-named Operation Woodrose. The aim of this operation was to 'flush out terrorists and their sympathizers' from the villages in the *mand* (around river Beas) areas. According to a team of academics who visited the *mand* area after Operation Woodrose, the army "systematically terrorized the youth between the ages of 16 to 20 and drove many youngsters to militancy."<sup>52</sup>

While the army and police operations combed the countryside in the Punjab, the entire top Kulak leadership of the Akali Dal was jailed. In their attempts to take advantage of the hurt sentiments of the Sikh masses, the Kulaks launched an ideological

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>51</sup> The causality account differs from the government's account of 493 killed to the Sikh activist's account of 10,000 killed. For the government version, see White Paper on Punjab Agitation (1985), op. cit. For the Sikh activists' version, see Inderjit Singh Jaijee (1995). *Politics of Genocide: Punjab 1984-1994*. Chandigarh: Baba Publishers.

<sup>52</sup> Dipankar Gupta et al. (1988). Punjab: Communalised Beyond Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (33): 1681.

offensive aimed at mobilizing all sections of the Sikh community under its command. The use and misuse of history to build an anti-Hindu Sikh identity became an important weapon in the arsenal of the Kulaks. The Indian army's action was equated with the demolition of the Golden Temple by an eighteenth century Afghan invader, Ahmed Shah Abdali<sup>53</sup>. The Kulaks-controlled SGPC used the occasion to issue a *hukamnama* excommunicating a Congress cabinet minister Buta Singh and President Giani Zail Singh; both were recruited by Indira Gandhi from the Sikh subaltern classes to build a political base among the *dalits* to counter the influence of the Kulak in the Punjab countryside. Giani Zail Singh was instrumental in helping build parallel centers of power among the Sikhs which challenged the dominance of the capitalist farmers. The Kulaks controlled religious and political organizations provided a platform to the militant elements who vowed to kill the enemies of the *panth*. One of their prime targets, Indira Gandhi, was killed by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984.

Immediately after her assassination, the underworld of lumpen elements, who were used by the Congress to settle scores with its political rivals, was mobilized by various Congress leaders, both national and local, to attack the Sikhs in Delhi and other places outside the Punjab. The Sikh and Punjabi Hindu petty bourgeoisie of Delhi lived in affluence amidst the grinding poverty of millions forced to live on the outskirts of the society<sup>54</sup>. Aided by the active support of many Congress leaders and the apathy of the police forces, the lumpen elements from the weaker sections grabbed an opportunity to loot the property of the Sikh petty bourgeoisie. The mobsters from the underworld went on a rampage to rape, kill and rob the property of the affluent Sikhs. The most to suffer

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<sup>53</sup> It was conveniently forgotten that Abdali was also a friend with many vested Sikh interests of the times, including the Sikh Maharaja of Patiala.

<sup>54</sup> The mentality of this class of *nouveau* rich is summed up by the statement of a businessman who is shown with his Mercedes on the front cover of *India Today*. "It is a global village," said A. Verma, "You can belong to the first world while living in the third world." November 10, 1997.

from these "anti-Sikh riots" of November 1984 were the Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie outside the Punjab, which had always remained loyal to the Congress and resented the efforts of the Punjab Kulaks to dominate the Sikh institutions under their control in the garb of an All India Gurdwara Act. Most of them had come from the Pakistani Punjab to settle in places like Delhi after partition. The riots forced many of them to look toward the Punjab as their only hope of living a safer life. Thus, a class of Sikhs who until now had shown no interest in the Kulaks-led Sikh agitation in the Punjab began showing solidarity with their "religious brethren" in the Punjab.

Operation Bluestar had isolated the Kulaks from other political groupings as no political party wanted to condone its methods of violent political activity. The riots of November 1984, however, not only built a temporary alliance with the urban Sikh petty bourgeoisie but also created an environment of sympathy among the political parties. With the exception of the Congress, almost all political parties condemned the administration for failing to come to the aid of the Sikhs during the riots<sup>55</sup>. The struggle for dominance between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie was leading to a path of mutual destruction. In order to restore the badly-damaged legitimacy of the state, the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, moved to strike deals with the Kulaks. Although a heightened sense of Sikh identity helped the Kulaks to strengthen its dominance over its Sikh constituency, its leadership remained divided over the future course of action. One dominant faction, led by Parkash Singh Badal, refused to strike a compromise with Rajiv Gandhi, which they felt would mean a settlement without any economic and political gains, while the faction led by Surjit Singh Barnala favored a compromise and preferred to settle differences through the legislature and the executives. Rajiv Gandhi was able to

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<sup>55</sup> Some investigation reports outrightly blamed the Congress party leadership for leading the mobsters and hoodlums against the Sikhs. See, *Who are the Guilty?: Causes and the Impact of the Delhi Riots (1984)*. Report of the People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (47): 1979-?

negotiate a memorandum of understanding- known as the Rajiv-Longowal agreement- with the Barnala faction on July 24, 1985. It was hoped that this agreement would speed the return of 'normalcy' to the state where the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie would be able to rule in a mutually-beneficial alliance.

## Chapter 8

### The Declaration of *Khalistan*

The compromise with the Kulaks, which came in the form of Rajiv-Longowal Accord, did not fulfill any of the long-standing demands of the Akali Dal. As a result, the Kulaks were split over the issue of what political strategy to adopt in the wake of the center's offer of a settlement without accepting the essence of the Kulaks demands embodied in the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution (ASR)<sup>1</sup>. Some sections of the Kulaks under the leadership of Surjit Singh Barnala showed their willingness to take the road of a negotiated settlement in the hope of capturing and maintaining its control over the state executive; while others, including Parkash Singh Badal, felt that a settlement which did not achieve major objectives of their political agitation after such death and destruction would be political suicide. Political differences apart, the Kulaks as a class did not abandon the path of agitation to press for their demands. As a result of the events of 1984, the Kulaks had hoped for a greater mobilization of the Sikh masses under their command to press the center to accept their major demands on the basis of the ASR. The brutal state oppression in the Punjab and the massacres of the Sikhs elsewhere had created the greater identity awareness among the Sikhs which the Kulaks had striven to achieve for years. Some factions of the Kulaks, who were outright unhappy with the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, were not averse to the idea of pursuing the agenda of a separate Sikh state<sup>2</sup>. The 1986 declaration of Khalistan issued from the *Akal Takhat* must be viewed in this context of factional struggle among the Kulaks.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rajiv-Longowal Accord only agreed to refer the decentralization demands of the ASR to Sarkaria Commission, which was set-up by Indira Gandhi to look at the state of center-state relations. It made no reference to the demands of the agricultural sector, the spirit of the ASR.

<sup>2</sup> According to Harbhajan Halwarvi, editor, *Punjabi Tribune*, the Declaration of Khalistan was nothing but a Kulak strategy aimed at forcing the government to negotiate the demands of the ASR. He argued that the Sikh landlords do not want to give up access to one of the largest markets for their agricultural products. The separation would have



Meantime, the auxiliary force drawn from the criminal underworld in the services of the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie turned the state into a killing field. The forces mobilized by Bhinderawale's militant brigades did not cease to exist with the death of their leader in 1984. In fact, the number of "militant" organizations increased dramatically after 1984. As the weapon and drug trade increased across the Indo-Pakistani border, the activities of the "narco-terrorist" networks flourished in the state. Small bands of mostly uneducated youth from the marginal and landless rural families found an easy route to riches through cross-border smuggling of weapons and drugs, and robberies and kidnappings<sup>3</sup>. However, the culture of assassination and extortion which flourished in the Punjab in the 1980s had neither originated with the rise of the Sikh militant organizations nor ended with their demise<sup>4</sup>. The rise of the criminal underworld with the expansion of predatory capitalism in the 1970s has become a permanent feature of the Indian and international political economy. The high and low points of its impact on the "normal" functioning of the bourgeois democratic state have depended on the levels of political rivalry among different factions of the ruling classes. If the Congress utilized the services of the underworld to settle scores with the Kulaks in the 1970s, the Kulaks mobilized the same strata to attack its political opponents. In an atmosphere of intense battles between industrial and agricultural interests, the forces of predatory capitalism benefited enormously from the political instability. It seized the opportunity provided by apparent chaos and anarchy in the state to loot, kidnap and murder.

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made them masters of the new state, but without access to the vast Indian market, it would have been impossible for the agricultural-rich landlocked state to survive. In addition, the Sikh landlords own large farms in the states of Haryana, Rajasthan and Western Uttar Pradesh. Thus, according to Halwarvi, it is not in the interest of the Sikh landlords to separate from India. (Harbhajan Halwarvi, Personal Interview, November 15, 1996)

<sup>3</sup> Pummy, a *Jatt* Sikh from Punjab, arrested in Karnatka on the charge of kidnapping, stated that he wanted to live a royal life but his family farm income was so meager that he could hardly survive. See *India Today*, October 6, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> For the political economy of the underworld, see Chapter 6.

Studies focusing on post-1984 events have attributed the rise of criminal activity and the continued political violence in the state to the decision of the Indian government to use force and the massacre of the Sikhs in 1984<sup>5</sup>. The argument is based on the assumption that the Indian government made a policy error in calling the army to crush the militants inside the Golden Temple. The subsequent police and army actions, such as Operation Woodrose, created a general resistance among the youth to the state and drove many to the camp of the militants. Joshi argued that "the major cause for the terrorist upsurge in the late 1980s and early 1990s was *Operation Bluestar*...and the accompanying *Operation Woodrose*, which alienated even moderate Sikhs."<sup>6</sup> Others have attributed the use of coercive apparatus to the "anti-Sikh" policies of the Indian government. The existence of the militant outfits is considered a reflection of the heightened sense of the Sikh ethnonationalism. Declaring that India has committed political suicide through its army operations in Punjab, Dhillon claims that the continued Sikh struggle was a sharp reaction to "a policy of discrimination, arbitrary and unilateral awards, sham negotiations, deceptive accords, confrontation and bloodshed."<sup>7</sup> Singh claims that ever since independence, the Indian state has exercised hegemonic control over non-Hindu ethnic groups. The post-1984 efforts by the Indian state to "re-establish hegemonic control" over the Sikhs "degenerated into violent control."<sup>8</sup> In this manner, the violence of "militant" Sikh organizations is explained as a reaction to the actions of the Indian government. The answer to the riddle of "action-reaction" of political events

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<sup>5</sup> For an argument that the army operations in the Punjab drove the youth to militancy, see Dipankar Gupta et al (1988). Punjab: Communalised Beyond Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (33): 1677-1684.

<sup>6</sup> Manoj Joshi (1993). Combating Terrorism in Punjab: Indian Democracy in Crisis. *Conflict Studies*, No. 261, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> G.S. Dhillon (1992). *India Commits Suicide*. Chandigarh: Singh and Singh Publishers, p. vii.

<sup>8</sup> Gurharpal Singh (1995). The Punjab Crises Since 1984: A Reassessment. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18 (3): 476.

can only be found in the political economy of the class nature of the state and the agitation. As we have seen, the political manifestations of this "Sikh agitation" clearly indicate that it was launched by the Kulak to press the center to accept the demands of the agricultural sector. The violent struggle between the political forces of two leading sectors of the economy, the agriculture and the industry, were responsible for the creation of the events of 1984. The army actions did not signal an end to the struggle between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie; they only indicated how far the exploiting classes were willing to go to safeguard their respective interests. The ruling classes were also aware of the fact that such rivalry can lead to mutual destruction. Hence the central leadership's attempts to achieve a peaceful compromise between the industrial bourgeoisie and the Kulak. The Rajiv-Longowal Accord was the product of such thinking.

### **The Rajiv-Longowal Accord.**

After becoming the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi initiated several moves to contact the Kulak leadership with a view to reaching a political settlement. The Congress, which had relied on the minorities and the *dalits* for electoral support in the 1970s, was trying to attract the rural and the urban rich to its fold in the 1980s. Indira Gandhi's policy of confrontation with the Kulak in the 1970s left the Congress without a powerful base in the countryside. The appointment of the Sarkaria Commission by Mrs. Gandhi and the settlements reached with various regional forces by Rajiv Gandhi were efforts to win over the agrarian interests. Several Akali leaders, including Harchand Singh Longowal, who was appointed as the "dictator" of the *dharm yudh morcha* by the Akalis, were released from jail in March 1985. On March 12, a rich landlord from Madhya Pradesh, Arjun Singh, was appointed the Governor of the state<sup>9</sup>. Through Arjun

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<sup>9</sup> The move was clearly to please the Kulaks of the Punjab who showed their willingness

Singh's mediation, a meeting between Harchand Singh Longowal and Rajiv Gandhi produced a 'Memorandum of the Punjab Settlement'- what came to be known as the Rajiv-Longowal Accord- on July 24, 1985. Although Parkash Singh Badal and Gurcharn Singh Tohra did not participate in the negotiations, the Working Committee of the Akali Dal approved the Accord on July 26, 1985. This signified that at least the majority of the Kulak were in favor of the Accord.

The reluctance to endorse the Accord by some major players among the Kulak, including Badal and Tohra, can be attributed to the failure of this settlement to accept the long-standing demands of the agricultural capitalists in any concrete fashion. The only reference to the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution was made in the context of the Sarkaria Commission's ongoing work to study the center-state relations. The Accord acknowledged the contention of the Akali Dal that the ASR "attempts to define the concept of Center-State relations in a manner which may bring out the true federal characteristics of our unitary constitution." In view of this, the Accord stated that the ASR "*in so far as it deals with Center-State relations* (emphasis added) stands referred to the Sarkaria Commission."<sup>10</sup> The terms of reference of the Sarkaria Commission, appointed in 1983 to review the working of the existing arrangements between the Union and states, were so limited that it could not propose any changes to the existing constitutional divisions of powers.<sup>11</sup> The ASR had demanded a radical re-arrangement of

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to negotiate a settlement through the mediation of the Kulaks interests from other regions.

<sup>10</sup> For all references to the Accord, see Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord (24 July 1985). in J.S. Grewal (1996). *The Akalis: A Short History*. Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publications, Appendices VIII, pp. 223-225.

<sup>11</sup> The Commission was appointed at the insistence of the Kulak forces of various different regions who had complained about the central encroachments in the state jurisdictions. The terms of reference of the commission maintained the original division of powers between the states, the Kulak territory and the center; the main domain of the industrial bourgeoisie must remain intact. Its power to suggest any alteration in the existing divisions of power were limited. The Commission was to "keep in view the

powers by demanding that the center should only keep jurisdiction in defense, foreign, currency and communication, while the rest of the powers must be transferred to the states. The Accord made no such promise. More importantly, the Accord did not even promise to look at the heart of the ASR demands- the economic demands of the Kulaks.<sup>12</sup>

The Accord also did not provide any favorable solution for the Kulaks of the Punjab on the contentious issue of the sharing of river waters. It preserved the status quo in the allotment of share of river waters between Haryana and Punjab. It promised to study the claims of the Punjab by referring the matter to a "tribunal to be presided over by a Supreme Court Judge."<sup>13</sup> The Punjab Kulaks, who had vowed not to give an ounce of Punjab's water to Haryana, found that the Accord gave assurance to the farmers of Haryana that the Satluj-Ymuna Link (SYL) canal would be constructed on priority basis. It actually set a completion deadline of August 15, 1986. Once the construction began, however, the Kulaks mounted such powerful opposition that the construction was immediately suspended. The militant brigades of the Kulak killed the director of the SYL and threatened to shoot anyone working on the project<sup>14</sup>. The Accord also did not give much assurance to settle the territorial claims of both the Punjab and Haryana<sup>15</sup>. It gave

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social and economic developments that have taken place over the years and have due regard to the scheme and framework of the Constitution which the founding fathers have so sedulously designed to protect the independence and ensure the unity and integrity of the country which is of paramount importance for promoting the welfare of the people." See B.L. Fadia and R.K. Menaria (1990). *Sarkaria Commission Report and Center-State Relations*. Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> The decision of the tribunal was expected in six months and binding on both parties. However, after more than a decade of negotiations, the current Kulaks-led Punjab government of Parkash Singh Badal has decided to boycott the proceedings of the tribunal- known as Eradi Tribunal.

<sup>14</sup> The project remains suspended to date.

<sup>15</sup> The Accord promised to set a boundary commission to take into consideration the claims and counter claims of both Haryana and Punjab.

Punjab the exclusive control over Chandigarh, the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana. However, it re-iterated the earlier promise of Indira Gandhi to Haryana by promising to constitute a commission "to determine the specific Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab which should go to Haryana" in lieu of Chandigarh.<sup>16</sup> A date was set (January 26, 1986) for the "actual transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab and areas in lieu thereof to Haryana." The Accord offered compensation to the innocents killed in the violent events of the post-1982 period and a promise to hold an independent inquiry into the Delhi riots. It also promised to rehabilitate the Sikh army deserters who had mutinied in the wake of the army action in Golden Temple with "gainful employment."<sup>17</sup> A long-standing demand of the Kulaks was incorporated in the Accord with a promise to formulate an All-India Gurdwara Act. Realizing that the urban Sikh petty bourgeoisie of Delhi, in particular, and outside the Punjab, in general, was opposed to such a move, the Accord stated that a "legislation will be brought forward for this purpose in consultation with Shiromani Akali Dal, *others concerned* (emphasis added) and after fulfilling all relevant

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<sup>16</sup> Indira Gandhi had promised to give the sub-divisions of Abohar and Fazilka to Haryana. These two Hindu majority sub-divisions are situated on the banks of a major river system (Balram Jakhar, former speaker of the *Lok Sabha*, is one of the leading capitalist farmer of this area). As they lack any direct territorial link with Haryana, a proposal was made to link Abohar and Fazilka through a corridor of villages taken from Punjab along with its border with Rajasthan. Since these are not the only sub-divisions with Hindu majorities, Indira Gandhi's decision was suspect. It has been suggested that her decision "appeared to be an attempt to make Haryana a riparian state." See, J.S. Grewal (1996). *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> A number of Sikh soldiers, especially from the pure Sikh regiments in Rampur, Bihar, had mutinied to 'protest the army's entry into the Golden Temple'. The frustration of the non-Commissioned stratum of the army can also be attributed to the Spartan life of the soldiers and low pay. The Indian army has a large number of Sikh officers [Cohen (1990) estimates the figure at twenty per cent], but none of the Sikh commissioned officers took part in the mutiny. In fact, the army action against the Golden Temple was led by a Sikh General. Most of the Sikh officers come from the Kulak background, yet they only obeyed their chain of command. The life of the officers in the military is relatively comfortable and rewarding. The kind of frustration which may have triggered the Sikh soldier's mutiny is not experienced by the officer corps.

constitutional requirements."<sup>18</sup> When compared with the demands put forward by the Kulaks in the ASR, the Rajiv-Longowal Accord achieved very little. It was for this reason that sections of the Kulaks found little reason in supporting the agreement. The man who had signed the deal, Harchand Singh Longowal, fell victim to such opposition shortly after signing the Accord.

Despite the assassination of Longowal, the elections promised by the central government were held on schedule on September 25, 1985. The Akali Dal, led by Surjit Singh Barnala, won a clear majority with 73 legislative seats compared with 32 won by the Congress in a 117 member assembly. All factions of the Akali Dal participated in the elections; however, a small but powerful faction of the Kulaks led by Parkash Singh Badal refused to accept any cabinet positions in the Barnala ministry in order to show their disapproval of the Accord. The implementation of various clauses of the Accord became more difficult with such opposition. The Chief Minister was unable to assure the construction of SYL in the face of a vigorous opposition from his own legislatures. Since Punjab refused to give any territory to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh, the transfer of the capital to the Punjab did not take place on time<sup>19</sup>. Despite the non-implementation of the Accord, the Barnala government was able to deliver on its promise of releasing all "militants" of the Kulaks auxiliary force, arrested since the beginning of the *dharm yudh morcha*<sup>20</sup>. The released "militants" joined their counterparts outside in opposition to the state government, which came to be viewed as a stooge of the central government. An ardent opponent of Barnala, the SGPC president Gurcharn Singh Tohra opened the doors of various Sikh shrines, including the Golden Temple, for the sections of the Kulak and its militant brigades opposed to the government. The militant organizations, backed by

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<sup>18</sup> In view of the vigorous opposition from the "others concerned", no legislation to enact an All-India Gurdwara Act has been proposed to this date.

<sup>19</sup> Badal and his supporters asked Barnala to resign in protest but he refused.

<sup>20</sup> On the recommendations of the Bains Committee, most of the arrested "militants" were released from the state's jails.

anti-Barnala forces, issued a call to hold *Sarbat Khalsa*<sup>21</sup> on April 13, 1986, the day of *Baisakhi*, which called for the establishment of *Khalistan*. Finally, on April 29, 1986, a Declaration of *Khalistan* was issued from the *Akal Takhat*, Amritsar

### **Declaration of Khalistan**

Whether the declaration of Khalistan was made as a part of the political strategy of the Kulaks to force the center into negotiations by taking a tough stand, or whether it was a political statement that separation from India is a real option, the contents of the document of the declaration were clearly in line with the Kulaks demands contained in the ASR and other political documents. In order to ensure the ruling classes of their continuing dominance, the declaration stated that the establishment of *Khalistan* is not intended "to bring about any change in the present form of government/administration set up so that day-to-day work may not suffer"<sup>22</sup> as a result of this change. The *Constitution of Khalistan*, issued by Dr. Jagjit Singh Chohan in 1984, had promised to do away with the pluralist democracy of the bourgeois republic. It assured the dominant classes that stability of the system would be assured through the rule of "one political party...and this party shall be supreme and over and above the government."<sup>23</sup> The constitution also guaranteed the dominance of the Sikhs in the new state by stating that "seventy five per

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<sup>21</sup> Gathering of the entire *Khalsa Panth*. The institution developed during the eighteenth century when the Sikh warlords used to gather at the *Akal Takhat* to take decisions. Now, it is physically impossible to bring all the Sikhs to the meeting place. The SGPC, which is a democratically elected representative body of the Sikhs, has assumed the modern role of a decision making for the Sikhs. Since the militants could not trust the SGPC to take a stand on a separate Sikh state, they sought to by-pass the process by resorting to a historical tradition of the *Sarbat Khalsa*.

<sup>22</sup> For all references to the declaration, see Document of the Declaration of Khalistan (1986), *World Sikh News*, April 24-30, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> For all references to the constitution, see Constitution of Khalistan (1984), in *Politics of Sikh Homeland (1994-1990)*. By Gopal Singh, New Delhi: Ajanta, Appendices xviii: 306-324.



cent of the seats in the electoral bodies will be reserved for the *Khalsa*, while other religious communities will share the rest of the twenty five per cent."

The declaration promised to press for "changes in the social structure". It neither spoke about the exploitation and the oppression of the Kulaks in the countryside nor about the concentration of wealth in the hands of this minority. Instead, the backwardness of the "village people" was blamed on the urban petty-bourgeoisie. The declaration stated that the "children of the urban settlers and the rich" enjoy the bounties of nature much more than their fare share while "the children of the poor and the village people continue to remain backward from generation to generation due to illiteracy, poverty, and sickness." The constitution had also singled out the power of the cities, and vowed to put an end to that power. The constitution proposed an administrative solution to check the power of the cities by making "each ward of a city...an independent unit like a village." The issue of the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the capitalist farmers in the villages remained outside the domain of proposed changes to the social structure. Instead, the declaration made a classical liberal promise of imposing "no limitation on any individual to prosper and flourish according to the best of his wisdom, labor and ability." It made no promise for the distribution of wealth to provide a solution for the countless numbers whose "wisdom, labor and ability" produced the prosperity of a small minority.

Unlike the ASR, in which the Kulak clearly articulated their economic and political aims, the Declaration of *Khalistan* is more ideological in nature. In order to build up a political constituency in the Punjab countryside dominated by the followers of Sikhism, the Kulaks have been attempting to present their aims and objectives as an integral part of the "Sikh political agenda." The constitution of the Shiromani Akali Dal, adopted in 1975, states that one of the party's main objective is "to maintain the feelings of a separate and distinct independent Panthic identity among the Sikhs, and to create such a time and space in which the national sentiments of the Sikh Panth and expression

of nationality can be completely materialized."<sup>24</sup> The declaration also promised to achieve similar results. In the populist account of the historical events narrated in the text of the declaration, the violent struggle between the Kulaks, and the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie becomes a struggle of the Sikhs against "Hindu" rulers of India. The declaration is full of charges to 'show' how the Indian government was determined to "annihilate the Sikhs and Sikhism by using all kinds of political, cultural, economic, administrative and military means."<sup>25</sup> Since the text of the declaration made Sikhism synonymous with the interests of the Kulaks, the promises of its "unhindered" flourishing in Khalistan was a political statement of the capitalist farmers that their hegemony would remain unchallenged. In an indirect reference to the presence of the Communist forces, the SAD constitution had vowed to "propagate the injunctions of the *Gurmat* (teachings of the Gurus)...and to endeavor to eliminate atheism." The constitution of *Khalistan* stated that the main function of the *Panthic* party "shall be to give practical shape to the truth, and commandments of Sikhism." Further, it stated that the Sikh religion shall be the state religion.

The ideological attempts of the Kulaks to highlight the "anti-Sikh" nature of the "Hindu" government of India suffered a serious blow when Barnala- one of their own- moved the police and para-military forces to remove "militants" from the Golden Temple.<sup>26</sup> The factional struggle inside the temple also unmasked the Kulaks attempts to

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<sup>24</sup> The Constitution of the Shiromani Akali Dal (1975). in *Politics of Sikh Homeland (1994-1990)*. Edited by Gopal Singh (1994). op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>25</sup> In its attempts to paint the events of 1984 as struggle between the Sikhs and Hindus, the declaration narrates numerous stories in the style of a war propaganda where truth is the first causality. For example, it states that before the Operation Bluestar, the "Hindu military officers and sepoys were mentally and emotionally equipped through their official magazine *Bat Cheet* for the complete extinction of the Sikhs." In fact, the army units that attacked the Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines were commanded by a Sikh military officer, Major-General Brar. It had several other Sikh officers, including one of Brar's superior, Lieutenant-General Dyal.

<sup>26</sup> He was later ex-communicated from the Sikh *panth* by breaking ranks and

give religious sanction to their actions. As the army action had damaged the *Akal Takhat*, the Kulaks had launched vigorous propaganda to show how the Indian government had destroyed the most sacred place of the Sikhs. The chief of the *Akal Takhat* has been compared with the Pope<sup>27</sup>. The aim of the propaganda was to establish the religious sanctity of these places of worship which would establish the credentials of the people in charge of these shrines. Thus the chief of the *Akal Takhat* drove his legitimacy not from his patronage appointment by the Kulaks controlled SGPC but from the religious sanctity of the *Akal Takhat*.<sup>28</sup> The factional struggle among the Kulaks, however, took the veneer of religious sanctity of this seat of temporal authority. In order to establish their dominance, various factions started appointing their own *Jathedars* to the Akal Takhat. In order to by-pass the control of Tohra faction over the SGPC, some factions began relying on the tradition of the *Sarbat Khalsa* to appoint their own men to this important seat. Since 1986, the *Akal Takhat* has witnessed the appointment of seven *Jathedars* in as many years.<sup>29</sup>

In the wake of the police action in the Golden Temple, the Barnala government came under serious criticism from the Kulaks factions who had opposed the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. As the government was unable to complete the SYL project, the

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strengthening the hands of the central government.

<sup>27</sup> An SGPC publication compared the Golden Temple with Mecca, St. Peter's in the Vatican, Jerusalem and Varanasi to show its religious significance. See, Kapur Singh (1995). *The Golden Temple: Its Theo-Political Status*. Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> During his life, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, who had transformed Sikhism into a corporate body of the *Khalsa*, never visited the Golden Temple even once. Following his death, the *Akal Takhat* became a major center to settle conflicts among the Sikh military leaders and rulers.

<sup>29</sup> After Operation Bluestar, the SGPC appointed Kartar Singh who was replaced by Jasbir Singh Rode, a nephew of Bhinderawale. As he was abroad, Gurdev Singh Kaonke was appointed *Jathedar* after the declaration of *Khalistan*. He was replaced by Darshan Singh Ragi who was appointed as an acting *Jathedar* and the jailed militant Ranjit Singh, who had murdered the *Nirankari* chief Gurbachan Singh, as the permanent *Jathedar*.

center came under pressure from the Kulaks in Haryana. Isolated from the dominant factions of the Kulaks in the state, the Chief Minister of Punjab could not ensure the completion of the canal. In a populist move to please the Kulaks of Haryana on the eve of assembly elections, Rajiv Gandhi dismissed the eighteen months old Barnala ministry on May 11, 1987. The struggle over water resources was one of several key problems faced by the Kulak forces in the country. In an apparent effort to bring the Kulaks on its side, Rajiv Gandhi government had increased the fertilizer and other input subsidies for the agricultural sector. The ever stronger class of the capitalist farmers wanted far higher prices for agricultural products and more subsidies for inputs. The political alliances struck with various regional Kulak forces in the hope of a peaceful compromise between agriculture and industry fell apart toward the end of the decade. Led by Vishwa Partap (VP) Singh, a section of the Kulaks walked away from Rajiv Gandhi's Congress to the *Janata* Party coalition of the capitalist farmers. The Kulaks of the Punjab joined this anti-Congress coalition, which also included the BJP, and won 8 out of 13 parliamentary seats<sup>30</sup>. This shaky coalition of scattered Kulak forces in alliance with the BJP, a party of the industrial capital and the urban petty bourgeoisie, was also unable to provide any solution to the political agitation of the Kulaks of the Punjab. Apart from the opposition of the BJP, the Kulaks interest of Haryana, whose chief representative Devi Lal was serving as the deputy prime minister, were vehemently opposed to any deal which would

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<sup>30</sup> A clear example of how both the industrial and the agricultural interests were using the "militant" brigades to further their political aims was provided by the victory of a "militant" leader from the Patiala constituency of the Punjab. In order to split the Akali votes, therefore assuring the victory of the Congress candidate, Governor Sidarath Shankar Ray struck a secret deal with a jailed militant, Atinder Pal Singh. On the request of the Governor, Atinder Pal Singh filed his papers with the returning officer as an independent. He was hailed as a candidate of some fictitious militant Sikh organizations who were opposed to the moderate leadership of Parkash Singh Badal. The entire cost of his election was covered by funds from Governor Ray. Instead of just splitting the Akali votes, Atinder Pal Singh won his constituency seat with a large margin. (Lal Singh, former Minister of Food and Supply, Personal Interview, October 14, 1996.)

deprive them of access to river waters and territorial units under their control<sup>31</sup>. The internal contradictions of this coalition, which witnessed two prime ministers in as many years, made it difficult for the government to offer any settlement to the Kulaks of the Punjab. In the absence of a stable government in the Center, the Punjab administration working under the President's rule continued to face violent opposition from the Kulaks whose auxiliary forces had stepped up their attacks on their political opponents. The political situation deteriorated further as the forces of the underworld, who had been operating profitable ventures of smuggling, kidnapping and robberies, seized the opportunity to spread their wings in an environment of chaos and anarchy<sup>32</sup>.

### **The criminal underworld**

The robber baron mentality of the luxury consumer goods producing capital, which was born and protected under the state's license permit *raj* regime during the 1970s, gave birth to a stratum of profit seekers whose ambitions knew no bonds and who were willing to do anything to realize "windfall profits."<sup>33</sup> In Punjab, this stratum profited greatly from the drug and weapon trade across the Indo-Pakistani border<sup>34</sup>. The 1980s witnessed a considerable rise in the weapon trade along the Punjab border, mainly due to the massive arms shipments that arrived for the Afghan *Mujahadins*. With the

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<sup>31</sup> The Akali Dal, headed by Simaranjit Singh Mann, was not a partner in this coalition. In the hope of a favorable political settlement, the Kulak gave a huge welcome to V.P. Singh when he arrived in Amritsar to visit the Golden Temple.

<sup>32</sup> According to one set of figures, the death toll in the political violence was 5,521 for the entire decade of 1980s but it rose to 6,000 murders in the first two years of the decade of 1990s. See Manoj Joshi (1993). op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> For the political economy of the rise of predatory capitalism, see Chapter 6.

<sup>34</sup> What has been considered the tip of the iceberg by the Police authorities, the number of weapons seized by the Punjab Police alone (the main responsibility of checking smuggling lies with the Border Security Force) along the border between 1987 and 1997 were as follows: 2,715 AK-47s, 1,408 Rifles, 6,000 revolvers. See *India Today*, September 29, 1997.

victory of military-industrial capital with the election of Ronald Reagan, the weapons trade witnessed a many-fold increase. The conventional arms manufacturers, in particular, who were losing ground to the nuclear weapon producers in the home market<sup>35</sup>, seized an opportunity created by political instability in various regions to flood these markets with their weaponry. Western capital, along with the Islamic countries, poured sophisticated conventional weaponry into the region to the flash point of Afghanistan to force its entry into the global capitalist market. The supply of this cheap weaponry to various weapons smugglers made it a profitable venture across the border in the Indian market<sup>36</sup>.

Though the risk of running smuggling operations, especially for the small scale smugglers without connections to the police, paramilitary, and political leaders, is enormous, the profits are lucrative for those who are successful. For the uneducated youth from marginal and landless peasantry, who were raised on a steady diet of populist promises<sup>37</sup> but witnessed a steady decline in their fortunes, no risk was too high to become instant millionaires. Thus, the life of crime appealed to those who had "inflated aspirations" and wanted "to become rich overnight."<sup>38</sup> The successful operators of these "narco-terrorist" organizations inevitably developed political connection by offering their

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<sup>35</sup> In just one decade from 1973 to 1983, the nuclear weapons production "mushroomed from a million dollar industry to \$ 30 billion business." See, John Cavanagh (1985). Arms, Multinationals and Foreign Policy. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (17): 753.

<sup>36</sup> India was ranked by international arms experts as among the worst hit countries by the illegal proliferation of Non-Major Weapons System (NMWS). See, *India Today*, February 15, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> From the Congress party's promise of "removing poverty" to the Akali promise of turning "Punjab into Canada" (See *Ajeet*, November 24, 1996), the politicians of every hue have made populist promises in every elections. In the most recent elections to the Punjab assembly, the Akalis, according to a leading business daily of India, were "offering the moon to the people of Punjab." See, *The Economic Times* (Online Edition), February 1, 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Sucha Singh Gill (1988). Contradictions of Punjab Model of Growth and Search for an Alternative. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (42): 2168.

services to various politicians<sup>39</sup>. In the 1970s, it was the Congress, *albeit* not alone, which made use of the services of this underworld through its auxiliary forces like the Congress Youth Wing and the *Lok Seva Dal*. The Kulaks-controlled organizations like All-India Sikh Students Federation and the Akali Youth Wing also made use of this criminal stratum which rose to prominence during the *dharm yudh morcha*.<sup>40</sup> As political instability increased, the criminal organizations mushroomed. The news reports from the state indicated that money made from smuggling, extortion and loot was used to buy properties in the rural and urban centers.<sup>41</sup> The reports also claimed that the militant organizations indulged in rapes and abductions of young women at gun points in what was termed as "sexual terrorism." These reports, however, failed to observe that sexual harassment of the women of the subaltern classes is a part of the daily exploitation and oppression of this stratum by the Kulaks. The sexual exploitation in the form of rapes of the women from the weaker sections was not a special phenomenon of the general political instability. A recent study pointed out that, in fact, the rate of crimes against women in the form of rape has increased three fold since 1991<sup>42</sup>, a year when militant violence was at its peak. The study found that the rapes were committed by the youth from the "well-off families which gained immensely from the green revolution."<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> In June 1997, an operator of the underworld, Nirvail Singh- a confidant of Maninderjit Singh Bitta, ex-president of the All-India Congress Youth Wing, was arrested in Amritsar, a border district, for extorting money from the business people in the name of the *Khalistan* Commando Force. He stated that his main task was to bring "volunteers for Bitta's various rallies." *Times of India* (Online Edition), June 26, 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Scores of criminals were arrested for their crimes ranging from robberies to kidnappings to murders, but once the Kulak came to power in the state in 1985, all the "youth prisoners" were released.

<sup>41</sup> According to one report, between 1987 and 1992 the criminal gangs had extorted Rs. 1 billion and siphoned it into moveable and immovable property. *India Today*, October 31, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Sarbjit Pandher (1997). *Nasty Ways of the Neo-Rich*. Chandigarh: Institute of Development and Communication. From <http://www.ankhilapunjab.com>, September 1, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

existence of "sexual terrorism" during the "religious" agitation only points to the class nature of this struggle. The culture of the Kulaks oppression prevailed both during the time of "political crisis" and after the "return to normalcy."

### **The Return to Normalcy**

After the Kulaks-led coalitions at the center collapsed, the Congress returned to power, *albeit* in minority, under the leadership of Narsimha Rao in 1991. Rao came to power at a time when the industrial production had stagnated and the country was facing serious financial crisis. The deficits in the balance of payments on the foreign debt forced the government to borrow more from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The new loans came with strong demands from international capital to "reform" the state-regulated industrial policy and to further open the doors to foreign capital. The reform package which was launched in June 1991 by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh contained policies for micro stabilization, on the one hand, and structural adjustment of different sectors of the economy, on the other. The panacea for the former came in the form of reduction of budget deficits and devaluation of the rupee, and for the latter, "a package for delicensing a large part of industrial activity....Agriculture did not appear in any significant way in the structural adjustment program."<sup>44</sup> It was through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the opening of doors to agribusiness corporations that the agricultural sector was most affected. The patent laws on various seed varieties would boost the price beyond the capacity of small and medium farmers. Rich farmers appreciated various parts of the liberalization package as they sought to increase the agricultural prices to international levels. The pro-Kulak policy think-tanks claimed that "Indians have been paying about 40 per cent higher prices for industrial

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<sup>44</sup> Ashok Gulati (1995). Rapporteur's Report on New Economic Policy and Indian Agriculture. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 50 (3): 570.



commodities than those prevailing in the world markets,"<sup>45</sup> while agricultural prices were suppressed to below international market prices. Rao stated that "it is now beyond controversy that agriculture in India has been disprotected, whereas industry has been heavily protected."<sup>46</sup> Needless to say, according to Rao, "the terms of trade for agriculture have been unfavorable when compared to the situation that would have prevailed in the absence of such protection for industry."<sup>47</sup> However, the Kulaks have vehemently opposed any cut in subsidies to the agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides, as the finance minister had proposed.

Although the Congress party continued to cater to the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie, the steady growth in the strength of the Kulaks suggested that a confrontation, which Indira Gandhi had initiated by expelling the Kulaks-led syndicate from Congress in the late 1960s to secure her political survival, with this powerful class would be politically unwise<sup>48</sup>. In view of the much needed political stability required to fulfill the obligations to international and domestic capital, Rao decided to hold elections to the Punjab assembly and the parliamentary seats in February 1992. As prime minister Rao refused to negotiate any deal with the Kulaks, the Akali Dal decided to boycott the elections<sup>49</sup>. The Kulaks mobilized its auxiliary force to enforce the boycott. In the face of the open threats of the use of force, only one-quarter of the eligible voters, mainly in

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 572.

<sup>46</sup> C.H. Hanumantha Rao (1995). Liberalization of Agriculture in India: Some Major Issues. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 50 (3): 469.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> The number of Kulaks parliamentarians increased from 22.5 per cent in 1952 to 38.3 per cent in 1984 and 51.8 per cent in 1996. *India Today*, July 15, 1996.

<sup>49</sup> In its confrontation with the Kulaks, the Congress was able to recruit sections of the capitalist farmers who disagreed with the strong arm tactics of the Akali Dal. The leadership of the Congress party's state unit was given to a Kulak leader from Ludhiana district, Beant Singh. For the first time since 1967, the Congress ministry of Beant Singh included powerful Kulak interests like Harcharn Singh Brar, Brij Bhupinder Singh Kang, and Partap Singh Bajwa.

the urban centers, came to vote. The voter turn out was 38.3 per cent in the urban areas and only 15.1 per cent in the countryside.<sup>50</sup> The militants had not only warned the candidates but also the voters not to disobey their orders. A wall poster stated:

The enemies of the *Panth*, who are participating in the election process, must take a serious note that the militants will not only kill the candidates but also their immediate family members and relatives. The homes and property of the candidates will be destroyed. The city dwellers must note that they should not take advantage of the security cover provided to them by the state and vote in the upcoming elections. If they fail to heed our warnings, we shall teach them a lesson with Assault Rifles and remote control bombs. The people must observe a curfew from the morning of February 18 to the evening of February 19. In towns and villages of the state, anyone found roaming in the streets will be shot.<sup>51</sup>

The Congress won 74.4 per cent of the assembly seats and 92.3 per cent of parliamentary seats with just 10.2 per cent of the popular vote. Thus, the Congress Chief Minister Beant Singh's government came to be known as "ten per cent government." The Kulak boycott gave 12 more Members of Parliament to the minority government of Narsimha Rao. At the same time, it gave a clear signal to the state that some action was urgently required to reinforce the authority of the state. At the time of the elections, the Punjab had witnessed one of largest security operation of its kind. There were 120,000 army personnel along with 53,000 Punjab Police forces, 28,000 Home Guards, 10,000 special police and 70,000 paramilitary personnel on active duty in the Punjab.<sup>52</sup> This massive security apparatus was put in motion to eliminate 'militancy' from the state by the newly-elected government of Punjab.

Immediately after forming the government, the Congress Chief Minister Beant Singh convened a cabinet meeting to tackle the issue of militancy. In a clear move to

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<sup>50</sup> *India Today*, March 15, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> A Wall Poster (translated from Punjabi). see *Indo-Canadian Times*, June 26, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> Gurharpal Singh (1996). Punjab Since 1984: Disorder, Order and Legitimacy. *Asian Survey*, 36 (4): 414.

finish the political agitation of the Kulaks, the cabinet decided to give full powers to the security forces led by Kanwar Pal Singh Gill. As Director-General of the Punjab police, Gill was only answerable to the Chief Minister, thus by-passing the ministry of home affairs. The decision to use the full force of the coercive apparatus of the state went hand in hand with state propaganda to isolate the Kulaks through public meetings and rallies. For this purpose, the cabinet also decided to form 14 mass contact groups led by cabinet ministers who were to hold at least four public meetings a day. The message was sent to the people that they could provide information about the whereabouts of the militants to their elected officials instead of police, which they suspected and feared. Kulak forces who were willing to lay down their weapons would receive general amnesty, while the rest would be eliminated with force.<sup>53</sup> The smuggling operations came to a halt as the 514 kilometers long border of Punjab was sealed with a seven foot high wire fence which became "live with high voltage fed into it."<sup>54</sup> The government launched its offensive in March 1992, and by the end of 1992, all but a small number of militants were eliminated.

While the ability of the Kulaks auxiliary force to strike terror in the hearts of its enemies was greatly reduced, it was not totally eliminated.<sup>55</sup> The Akali Dal returned to the arena of electoral politics with the announcement of elections for village councils in January 1993. After winning a majority of the councils in its home turf, the Kulaks began mounting a challenge to the Congress regime in the state. Both chief ministers, Beant Singh and his successor Harcharn Singh Brar, had taken a hard stand on river water issues by refusing to construct the SYL canal, but other demands of the Kulak, such as

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<sup>53</sup> All information about cabinet meetings and decisions was provided by Lal Singh, former Minister of Food and Supply (Personal Interview, October 14, 1996). At the time of the interview, Lal Singh was still a minister in Harcharn Singh Brar's Congress government.

<sup>54</sup> *India Today*, February 15, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> Two years after his election, Chief Minister Beant Singh was assassinated inside the heavily guarded compound of the Punjab secretariat.

free electricity, were ignored. The Akali Dal accused the Congress government of not standing up to the Central government in order to secure higher prices for agricultural products. It also promised free electricity and free water to all the farmers of the Punjab. It struck an electoral alliance with the urban petty bourgeoisie with a promise of elimination of octroi and government inspectors, a major source of "pain" for the urban traders and merchants.

Despite their repeated claims of support from all the Sikhs, the Kulaks could not make any inroads into the ranks of the subaltern classes. The acts of the Kulaks militant brigades, in fact, pushed away this stratum which had suffered the brunt of the state and militant oppression. As the economic activity at nights came to a complete halt and many business units closed as a result of the continued political violence, the subaltern classes and the working poor suffered the most. When the security forces carried out their operations in the villages and towns, this stratum of the population was the first victim of police excesses. The militant organizations issued orders to ban the sale of tobacco and liquor which affected the employment of the working classes. Such 'religious edicts' were enforced through random killings of those who manned the tobacco and liquor outlets, the working poor. Similarly, when the militants issued dictates to stop the publication of *Hind Smachar* group of newspapers owned by the Jagat Narain family, it was the poor paper boys who became the target of the militant bullets. Above all, not a single political document of the Kulaks ever took up the issue of the landless laborers in the countryside. Realizing that the Kulaks were unable to build a broad-based political front of the Sikhs to mount strong opposition, the Akalis began making efforts to establish their credentials with the *dalit* community. The attempts began during the 1996 parliamentary election when the Kulaks forged an electoral alliance with the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP), a political organization of the "lower caste" petty bourgeoisie. The affirmative action programs of the state and the political necessity of securing the votes of the *dalits* for the major parties, in particular the Congress, had created a power bloc among the subaltern

classes. As the Congress began catering to the 'middle classes' in the 1980s, a section of this power bloc moved to form a political organization with *dalits* as its sole constituency. This *dalit*-based power bloc of the urban petty bourgeoisie has shifted alliances and political stands to ensure its political survival. Its political alliance with the Akalis ignored the ground realities of the Kulak oppression against the *dalits*, its major constituency.<sup>56</sup> The alliance only lasted through the parliamentary elections that secured the victory of the eight Akalis and two BSP candidates, including its leader Kanshi Ram, from a total of thirteen parliamentary seats in the Punjab. Six months later, the Akalis were back with their old political partner, the BJP.

The Kulaks-led Akali-BJP alliance won an overwhelming majority in the assembly elections by capturing four-fifth of all the seats. They managed to get 50 per cent of the polled votes against the Congress's 25 per cent.<sup>57</sup> Once in power, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal implemented his first promise of free electricity and water to the farmers of the state at a cost of 3.5 billion rupees. The electricity to the farmers was already heavily subsidized. If the entire cost was calculated, the total bill for free electricity to the farmers came at 11.8 billion rupees.<sup>58</sup> The issue of subsidies has come into sharp limelight after Union finance minister Chidambaram's vow to eliminate at least 50 per cent of all the subsidies. The White Paper on subsidies, issued by the finance minister, points out that the cost of subsidies of central and state governments is 15 per

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<sup>56</sup> The ironies of the joint campaign of these two strangest of bed fellows were provided by an Akali MLA from Nurmahal. Gurdeep Singh Bhullar told me that during the parliamentary campaign, he and other Akali workers were campaigning for a BSP candidate- Harbhajan Lakha- from the Phillour constituency. The rallying point of the BSP was its slogan to end the oppression of *Jatt-Khatri-Brahmin Tikri* (troika). Mr. Bhullar said that in this situation it was almost impossible to approach his own constituency of the *Jatt* Sikhs and ask them to vote for the BSP. The BSP cadre expressed similar opinions about the difficulties they encountered during the campaign. The *dalits* were questioning the rational of an alliance with their oppressors.

<sup>57</sup> *The Hindustan Times* (Online Edition), February 13, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> *India Today*, April 30, 1997.

cent of the gross domestic product.<sup>59</sup> The cost of subsidy to the farmers in the form of concessional power tariffs is 215 billion rupees.<sup>60</sup>

The Kulaks-led coalition government has resisted the efforts of the representatives of the industrial bourgeois parties to eliminate various agricultural subsidies. The farmers of the Punjab and Haryana issued a challenge during the harvest season of 1997 by vowing not to sell wheat to the central agencies. Led by an all-India Kulaks organization, *Bhartaya Kisan Union*, the boycott alarmed the central government as it was unable to procure necessary wheat for its Central Pool. Although the Kulaks-led United Front government had raised the price of wheat by 25 per cent compared with the price of last year, the Kulaks demanded a still higher price. The central government, in return, banned the private sale of wheat and asked the BJP leader Vajpayee, whose party is a coalition partner in both Haryana and Punjab, to press upon the governments of Punjab and Haryana to allow the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to procure wheat.<sup>61</sup> Another worry of the central planners stems from the decline of area under wheat production in the Punjab, which supplies 70 per cent of the wheat to the Central Pool. For the past three years, it has declined annually between 15,000 and 20,000 hectares as the farmers switch to cash crops like sugar-cane and sunflowers.<sup>62</sup>

The debate over issues such as subsidies to agricultural inputs and prices for agricultural outputs only point to the widening of differences within the ranks of the ruling classes of India. The contradiction between industry and agriculture has produced political struggles between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie which had gone beyond the "normal" limits of the bourgeois democracy. What the bourgeois authors refer to as "return of normalcy"<sup>63</sup> in the Punjab is nothing but a return, at least for the time

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<sup>59</sup> *The Economic Times* (Online Edition), May 6, 1997.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *The Economic Times* (Online Edition), April 25, 1997.

<sup>62</sup> *The Times of India* (Online Edition), April 25, 1997.

<sup>63</sup> After the elimination of most of the militant groups in 1993, life in Punjab was said to

being, of the struggle to the legislative chambers. The Indian bourgeois state has shown that it can tolerate no opposition, whether from the producing classes or from the sections of the ruling classes, that threatens capital's ability to accumulate, and the dismemberment of its secure market, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. By the massive use of coercive apparatus of the state- army, para-military and police forces- and the auxiliary forces under its command, the bourgeois state smashed the challenge of the Kulak of Punjab to the "stability" of this accumulation regime. The state has also shown that it can tolerate any amount of opposition inside the bourgeois chambers and the executive bodies. The Kulak, on the other hand, have shown that they are capable of conforming to the "normal", but they are also not afraid of taking a "dangerous tryst with abnormal" to safeguard their interests.

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have returned to "normal after its dangerous tryst with the abnormal." *The Times of India* (Online Edition) February 17, 1997.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes the following: (i) that the essence of the phenomenon of ethnonationalism can not be captured without the application of the political economy approach which seeks to understand its material context; (ii) that the problematic of the formation of Sikh identity can only be studied by focusing on the political economy of the Punjab in its dialectical relationship with the larger Indian social reality; (iii) that the specific form of Sikh ethnonationalism that had risen in the 1980s is linked with the capitalist development of the Punjab and India within the context of the international political economy; (iv) that the essence of this ethnonationalism of the Sikhs can only be understood in the context of the struggle for domination between agricultural capital and the Indian industrial capital; and (v) that the violence associated with this political agitation has its origins in the development of predatory capitalism in the 1970s in India and around the world. Finally, the study concludes that the rise of various ethnonationalist movements on the sub-continent and internationally suggest that there is a need for a comparative analysis of the political economy of these movements. Such a comparative analysis will enhance our understanding of the unique and universal features of the phenomenon of ethnonationalism.

Studies on ethnonationalism have ignored the context in which various identities take shape and the culture is influenced. The focus of various studies on cultural variables isolated from their material economic base gives rise to a phenomenon of several partial realities. Thus, for Anderson print capitalism becomes the sole force of building national identities and for Brass, it is the art work of an almighty economic and political elite that is able to construct and deconstruct identities at will. The lack of understanding of the material context of the phenomenon of ethnic identities and its dialectical relationship with the larger social reality thus produces as many conclusions as there are variables under study. The political economy approach, on the other hand,



contends that parts of social reality cannot be studied in isolation from each other as they are interlinked in a dialectical manner. By linking the political and cultural constructs with their economic roots, the political economy approach seeks to find what is the source of power and conflict in the society. It contends that the conflicts over political power are actually conflicts over access to material resources. Thus, in its attempts to understand the dialectical relation between politics and economics, the political economy approach locates the context in which various identities take shape.

The study of the political economy of the Punjab within the context of its larger Indian reality has given us a proper perspective on the various aspects of the problematic of the formation of Sikh identity. The material context of Sikh identity has revealed why certain aspects of this identity became hegemonic at particular historic moments. The study has argued that the dominant economic interests within Sikhism have historically shaped the inclusionary or exclusionary Sikh identity, but these must not be confused with the recent rise of Sikh ethnonationalism which is the specific product of the capitalist mode of production. Much like agricultural capital's attempts to establish unchallenged domination in the home market, the previous attempts of the Sikh power blocs did not always produce the desired results. Although attempts had begun after the death of the first Guru in 1539 to incorporate the followers of Nanak into a religious sect, the first serious move in the direction of defining the boundaries of Sikhism did not come until 1699. Guru Gobind and his followers faced a challenge from the Islamic *sufi* forces in their efforts to convert and maintain the loyalty of *Jatt* peasantry of the eastern Punjab. Thus, the first religious code that developed in the years following 1699 was strictly non- and anti-Islamic. The Sikhs *en mass* continued to live as a part of the larger "Hindu" society, but the Sikh warriors (the *Khalsa*) observed a strict code of conduct based on five Ks- *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kanga* (bangles), *Kachha* (breeches), *Kanga* (comb) and *Kirpan* (sword). The decline of *Mughal* power changed the power equations in which Sikh military leaders found themselves in different alliances, often in opposition

to each other, with either Muslim or Hindu landed interests. Thus, from the middle of the eighteenth century, when Sikh *misl*s established their rule in different parts of the Punjab, to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Sikh empire of Ranjit Singh collapsed in a series of wars with the British, the necessities of power sharing with the Muslim gentry and ruling over a large Muslim peasantry forced Sikh gentry to abandon its earlier anti-Muslim stand. The military establishment of Ranjit Singh included the *Khalsa*, Hindu and Muslim forces who fought common battles in the defense of this allegedly *Khalsa* state of the Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim *jagirdars*.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, efforts were underway to break from the larger "Hindu" society and create a distinct Sikh identity in its *Khalsa* form. The *Singh Sabha* movement, originated with the patronage of Sikh landed gentry in the 1870s, came to be dominated by the urban Sikh petty bourgeoisie by the late 1890s and early twentieth century. This class had enjoyed special privileges in the domain of trade and state bureaucracy of the Sikh empire. In British Punjab, the Sikh petty bourgeoisie found that it had lost its advantageous position to its numerically larger Hindu counterpart in both domains. In the colonial policy of divide and rule, the legislative and bureaucratic positions came in the forms of quotas for religious communities. The agenda of a separate Sikh identity vis-à-vis Hindus assured that a large share of the Sikh quota would go to the Sikhs. In the early twentieth century, when the British announced various quotas for the Sikhs, the Sikh petty bourgeoisie realized that the quotas actually went to the Sikh landed gentry, a loyal guardian of the British rule. The urban markets, especially for the agricultural products coming from the villages, were virtually monopolized by Hindu petty bourgeoisie. The only way to have a large share of the markets was to mobilize the Sikh peasantry and establish its presence. The temple reform movement of the 1920s provided a platform for the Sikh petty bourgeoisie to isolate Sikh landed gentry and establish its presence among the peasantry. In alliance with middle peasantry and sections of the rich peasantry under the leadership of the Indian industrial

bourgeoisie, the Sikh petty bourgeoisie became a nationalist force. As a result of the temple reform movement, the *Gurdwara* Act of 1925 came into existence. The act defined that anyone who declares that he believes in the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh religion is a Sikh. The acceptance of this broad definition, which was a far cry from the 1890s attempts of the *Singh Sabhas* to enforce a single *Khalsa* identity, showed that the petty bourgeoisie could adapt to any situation to safeguard its position. In the post-independence period, when the Sikh petty bourgeoisie felt frustrated over the losses it suffered during partition without any compensation like the peasantry which received part of the lost lands in the Indian Punjab, the slogans of the *Khalsa* homeland were back. Once the Sikh petty bourgeoisie moved to places outside India, it did not hesitate to join the ranks of a new linguistic identity with its Hindu counterparts. Its chief representative, Master Tara Singh, joined hands with Hindu activists to form the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*, which advocated that the Sikhs, Budhists, Jains and other Indian-born religious sects were all members of a Hindu community. Despite repeated attempts by the power blocs within Sikhism throughout its history, an exclusionary Sikh identity has not emerged. The caste-class and city-country cleavages among Sikhs have not disappeared. The struggles of the producing classes, on the other hand, have build cross-communal traditions among the Punjabis. Thus, the people continue to live in multiple identities.

The rise of Sikh ethnonationalism in the 1980s, however, is qualitatively different from the previous attempts of Sikh power blocs. It is associated with agricultural capital's struggle for domination with the larger and powerful industrial capital of India. The study has shown that the development of capitalism in the Punjab agriculture gave rise to a powerful class of capitalist farmers. A number of factors specific to the Punjab aided the speedy transition to capitalism in agriculture in this region. The partition of the Punjab, which resulted in the adoption of a policy of graded cuts to large landholdings, basically eliminated large feudal estates. Subsequent land reform acts eliminated the

tenancy, the intermediaries, and aided the process of consolidations. The transition to capitalism in agriculture strengthened the position of agricultural capital in the state while industrial capital remained weak. However, its dependence on the Indian industrial bourgeoisie for agricultural inputs from pesticides to tractors has made agricultural capital vulnerable to the pressures of this bigger and stronger industrial capital. It is in the nature of capital that big capital dominates small capital. The regional bourgeoisie has resisted the attempts of the national industrial bourgeoisie to undermine its domination in its home market, the Punjab. In this struggle for domination, agricultural capitalists, who largely belong to Sikh religion, and the industrial capitalists, who are largely Hindus, the regional bourgeoisie of the Punjab has invoked the ideology of Sikhism to build a political base of all Sikhs, not just the *Khalsa* Sikhs, to resist the efforts of the industrial capital. The political manifestations of Sikh ethnonationalism, from the *Anandpur Sahib* Resolution to the Declaration of *Khalistan*, speak volumes about the Kulaks nature of the "Sikh demands." Thus, the agenda of the Kulaks became the agenda of the Sikh *panth*. Although a great majority of rural Sikhs are landless laborers, the "Sikh political agenda" never included any program to distribute land. Instead, the ASR objected to the industrial bourgeoisie's attempts to impose land ceilings on the agricultural lands. Sikh institutions like the Akali Dal and the SGPC are dominated by the Kulaks. They have played a vital organizational role to spread the ideology of "Sikhism" imbued with the spirit of the economic and political interests of the Kulaks. While the industrial bourgeoisie has the capacity to mobilize other strata of the population through promises of expanded markets to the commercial bourgeoisie and promises of land distribution to the peasantry, agricultural capital, by its very nature, is unable to build such broad-based cross-class alliances. It can make no promises to either the commercial bourgeois interests or the rural poor, as these would endanger its very existence. As a result, the nationalism or sub-nationalism championed by agricultural capital has very limited appeal.

In the power struggle between the two leading sectors of the economy, agriculture and industry, Sikh capitalist farmers, like their counterparts in other regions of the country, have used the state executives to maintain their dominance while the industrial bourgeoisie has continued to rely on the central government to defend its interests. The demand of the Kulaks for a massive decentralization of powers in the name of "minority Sikhs" is nothing but an attempt to maintain their position of dominance in the state. The political tug-of-war between agricultural and industrial capital, that produced tensions in center-state relations in the 1970s, was a product of the economic crises of production of the 1960s and their attempted solutions by Indira Gandhi. The proposed solutions to the crises of recurring famines, falling industrial production, and the rising opposition of the people to the rule of the propertied classes created further problems for the state. In order to combat the revolutionary upsurge of the producing classes, Indira Gandhi relied heavily on the coercive apparatus of the state, on the one hand, and leftist rhetoric and populism, on the other. This only raised the expectations of the poor, while their material conditions did not improve. In order to silence the Kulaks opposition to her political status, Indira Gandhi began recruiting the minorities and the *dalits* in the party. This tactic drove the Kulaks away from the Congress, who formed various regional parties to safeguard their interests. Sikh agrarian interests, who had forced the petty bourgeois leadership of Master Tara Singh to merge with the Congress in 1948 and 1956, came to dominate the Akali Dal. The decision of Mrs. Gandhi to allow the inflow of foreign capital into the luxury goods sector through the directive control of the state in the form of license permit *raj* gave rise to a sector of the economy which produced "windfall profits". The bribes paid to the bureaucrats and the party functionaries to obtain licenses at any cost gave rise to a huge "black market" economy. The spin-off effect of this activity of predatory capitalist sector has been a phenomenal increase in the criminal underworld, which thrives on drug and weapon smuggling and other urban crimes.

The forces of predatory capitalism have provided the services of their auxiliary forces to the political parties in return for political favors. The pitched battles fought between the Kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie in the 1970s gave credentials to the underworld bosses who were willing to do the bidding of the Congress politicians. The cross-border smuggling of weapons and drugs in the Punjab gave rise to "narco-terrorists networks" in the state. While the state administration of Giani Zail Singh made use of the services of these auxiliary forces against its political opponents, it also developed close links with various godmen in the state, who had built parallel religious centers of power with their appeals to the subaltern classes and the rural poor, to challenge the Kulak control over the SGPC. The *Nirankaris*, the *Radhawamies* and the Bhinderawales became a part of the nexus of the goons, the godmen and the politicians. If the Congress made use of their services to corner the Kulaks, capitalist farmers were quick to exploit the rivalries among these parallel centers. The Kulaks were able to use the services of Bhinderawale not only to strike at the *Nirankaris* but also against the urban petty bourgeoisie, the Communists and the industrial bourgeoisie. As the Kulaks intensified their political struggle, the use of their auxiliary forces increased as the industrial bourgeoisie responded with the might of the state's coercive apparatus. The elimination of the Kulaks auxiliary forces by the state and the return of the Kulaks to the legislative chambers showed the strength of the industrial bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the inability of the Kulaks to win over other sections of the society despite their repeated appeals in the name of Sikhism, on the other. Sikh ethnonationalism displayed momentary strength with the rising tide of the Kulaks agitation for domination in its home market, the Punjab; it became weak as the Kulaks agitation fizzled. However, the struggle between agricultural capital and industrial capital that gave rise to Sikh ethnonationalism has not disappeared, nor have the forces of predatory capitalism disappeared that had given rise to the political violence in the state.

### **A Note for Further Research**

Finally, the study concludes that there is a scope to understand the phenomenon of ethnonationalism through a comparative analysis of the political economy of various ethnonationalist movements. India has witnessed the rise of Kashmiri, Sikh, Assamese, and other northeastern sub-nationalisms. The Tamils of Sri Lanka and *Muhajirs* of Pakistan have also produced challenges to their respective central authorities in the region. The common feature of these movements have been their demands for 'special status' or separation on the basis of ethnicity, be it religious, linguistic or tribal. None of these movements, however, have achieved any of their declared aims. Some ethnonationalist movements from other continents, like Eritrea in Africa and various former republics of Yugoslavia in Europe, have attained separation and formed independent states. A comparative analysis of these will be helpful in understanding what makes certain ethnonationalist movements more likely to succeed than others. It will also enhance our understanding of how and why ethnonationalist movements emerge.

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#### **Other Sources:**

Personal Interviews with over 50 bureaucrats, journalists, political workers and political leaders in the Punjab from September 1996 to December 1996.

## Appendix A

### Field Research and Methodology

A field research trip to the Punjab from September 1996 to December 1996 added immeasurably to the project's scope and insight. Apart from meeting and interviewing a great number of academics, bureaucrats, journalists, politicians, and ordinary folks from all walks of life, I benefited from the availability of enormous archival and other printed material from various research centers and university libraries. Teams of young scholars from the Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID) have conducted numerous studies on the rural life of the Punjab which were made available to me. Punjab scholars from all four universities- the Agriculture University, Ludhiana; the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; the Punjab University, Chandigarh; and the Punjabi University, Patiala- are engaged in various research activities related to the 'Punjab problem.' Most of them kindly shared their published and unpublished works with me. While the libraries of all four universities were very helpful in providing specific literature on the Sikhs, the collection of archival material on the Sikhs in the library of the Khalsa College, Amritsar, was enormously helpful.

The field trip coincided with the elections of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik* Committee (SGPC) in October 1996. I was able to witness the election campaign all over the Punjab. Specific attention was paid to the constituency of Mansa by traveling with the local Akali candidate, Giani Raghubir Singh. The election campaign was particularly heated as the SGPC elections were being held on the eve of Punjab assembly elections, which were held in the first week of February 1997. The campaign provided a unique opportunity to talk with people from all walks of life gathered in the village *saths* (gathering place) and town parks. Although no formal surveys were done to assess people's response to various questions, these informal meetings provided an interesting opportunity to discuss issues related to Sikh ethnonationalism and violence in the Punjab.

In the course of four months, I interviewed more than 50 bureaucrats, including police and army officials, and politicians. With minor exception, the names of the people interviewed are not published for security reasons. At times, the information provided by officials and politicians was very valuable, but their desire not to go public with such revelations tied my hands. Where possible, the gist of the information is summarized without revealing the sources only in the context of general discussion. The intensity of the debate on the 'Punjab problem' was reflected in the fact that interviews often lasted much longer than the time initially allocated by the respondents. The following questionnaire was used as a general guide for interviews.

Question No. 1: What, in your opinion, is the 'Punjab problem'? And what is the solution to this problem?

Question No. 2: What is Sikh ethnonationalism? What led to the rise of Sikh ethnonationalism in the 1980s?

Question No. 3: Are Sikhs a Nation? If so, what are the salient features of Sikh nation? How are they different from their Hindu counterparts, who are often related by blood?

Question No. 4: Why did the Akali Dal raise autonomy demand in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution? What is wrong with the present federal system of India? Who was behind the Declaration of Khalistan? What is on the 'Sikh agenda'- autonomy or separation?

Question No. 5: What is the role of caste and class in the Punjab politics? Do people identify themselves with caste or religion?

Question No. 6: How would you explain the rise of Jarnail Singh Bhinderwale? What is the root cause of Nirankari episode of 1978?

Question No. 7: Does the Akali Dal represents the Sikhs, in general, or a particular class among the Sikhs?

Question No. 8: Why did Sikh militants turn against the Communists, the Nirankaris and Hindus?

Question No. 9: What was the essence of Sikh demands? Are they compatible with the message of Sikh Gurus?

Question No. 10: How would you describe 'Operation Bluestar'? What was its impact?

Question No. 11: Who, in your opinion, was responsible for the massacres of the Sikhs in Delhi and other places? Why were the Sikhs targeted, by whom?

Question No. 12: What are the linguistic, territorial, economic and political demands of the Punjab? Do all sections of the Punjabi society support these demands?

Question No. 13: What are the reasons for the failure of the decade old Akali agitation? What was its impact on the Punjabi society?

## **Appendix B**

### **Who is a Sikh?**

**(1) The Gurdwara Act 1925** defined a Sikh as one who made the following declaration:

"I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in *Guru Granth Sahib*, that I believe in the ten Gurus and I have no other religion."

**(2) The definition of a Sikh in the *Sikh Reht Maryada*** (the Code of Conduct) was originally drafted by the SGPC's sub-committee on Conduct and Conventions in 1936 which was updated in 1945. It defines a Sikh-

"As any human being who faithfully believes in

- (i) One immortal Being,
- (ii) Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh,
- (iii) The *Guru Granth Sahib*,
- (iv) The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and
- (v) The *baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru*, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion."

**(3) The Delhi Gurdwara Act of 1971** defines a Sikh as follows:

"Sikh means a person who professes the Sikh religion, believes and follows the teachings of Sri *Guru Granth Sahib* and the ten Gurus only and *keeps unshorn hair*."

## **Appendix C**

### **Punjab: Basic Statistics\***

Population (1991).....	20.2 million
Rural population.....	70.5%
Urban population.....	29.5%
Density (per square km.).....	403
Literacy.....	58.5%
Females (per thousand males).....	882
Cities.....	10
Towns.....	110
Villages.....	12428
Area.....	50,362 Sq. Km
Average Rainfall.....	623.4 ml

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\* Source: Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Adviser to the Government of Punjab.

**Appendix D**  
**Punjab: Agriculture Statistics (1994-95)\***

Net Sown Area.....	4.2 mil hectares
Area Under Two Crop System.....	3.4 mil hectares
Wheat Production.....	13.5 mil tons
Rice Production.....	7.7 mil tons
Cotton.....	1.7 mil tons
Sugarcane.....	495,000 tons
Maize.....	322,000 tons
Rapseed and Mustard.....	103,000 tons
Sunflower.....	71,000 tons

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\* Source: Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Adviser to the Government of Punjab.

**Appendix E**  
**Punjab: Selected Health Statistics (1994)\***

**Birth Rate (Per thousand per annum)**

Rural.....	26.2
Urban.....	22.0
Combined.....	25.0

**Death Rate (Per thousand per annum)**

Rural.....	8.2
Urban.....	6.2
Combined.....	7.6

**Infant Mortality Rate (Per thousand per annum)**

Rural.....	59
Urban.....	35
Combined.....	53

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\* Source: Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Adviser to the Government of Punjab.



**Appendix F**  
**Punjab: Fourth and Seventh Five Year Plans\***

**Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74)**

Agriculture and Allied Services.....10.29 %

Irrigation and Power.....59.44 %

Industry and Mineral.....2.64 %

Social and Community Services.....12.23

**Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)**

Agriculture and Allied Services.....7.91 %

Irrigation and Power.....66.0 %

Industry and Mineral.....4.20 %

Social and Community Services.....13.44 %

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\* Source: Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Adviser to the Government of Punjab.

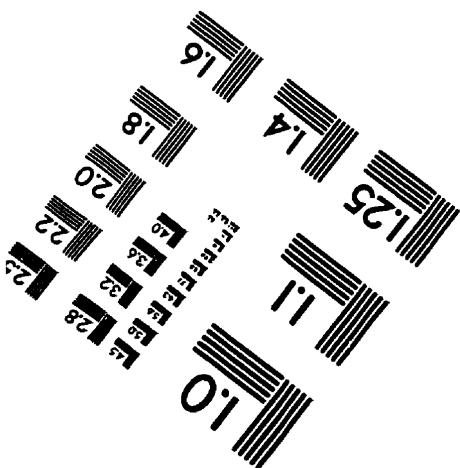
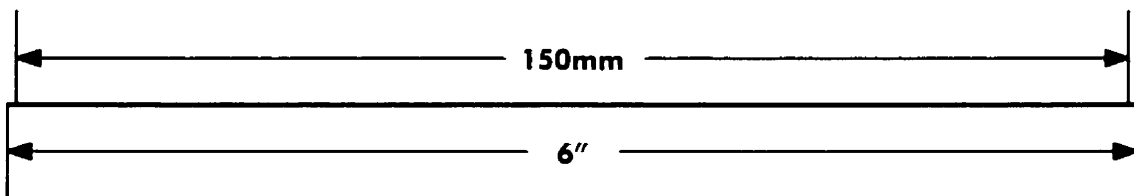
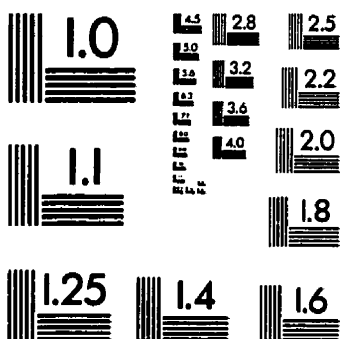
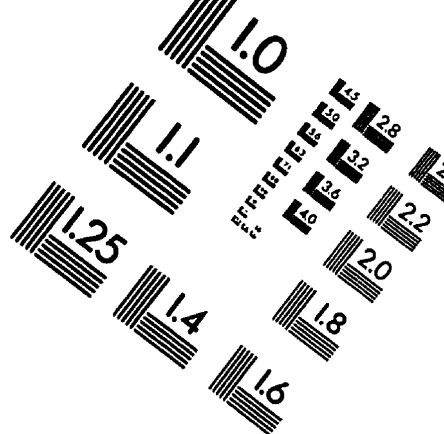
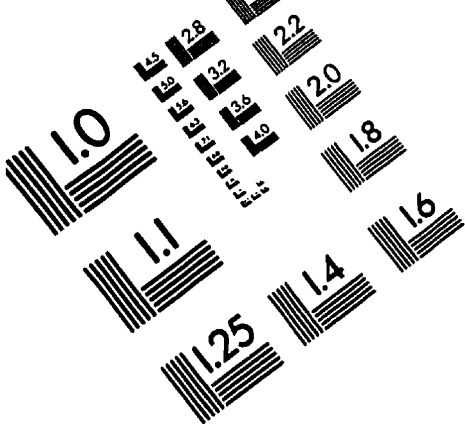
**Appendix G**  
**Punjab: Police Force\***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Other Ranks</b>	<b>Officers</b>
1970	20,090	141
1980	28,650	203
1985	35,794	361
1990	52,898	427
1994	69,630	598

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\* Source: Government of Punjab (1995). *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Economic Adviser to the Government of Punjab.

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